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G132 A STUDY OF THE SPANISH-SPEAKING PROTESTANT CHURCH
AND HER MISSION TO THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN MINORITY

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CHAPTER I

PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the work of the Spanish-speaking Protestant Church in the light of the history, past and present, of the Mexican-American. Out of this evaluation, we shall address ourselves to the question of its contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, its significance in the present, and its role in the future of this minority. The writer is also interested in presenting a total picture, rather than the usual fragmented one, of the Mexican-American, because it is only after we have the complete picture in mind that we can proceed to talk about the role of the church.

The basic assumption that underlies this study is that religion for the Mexican-American is a powerful influence in his daily life. Thus, the church can be an asset or a hinderance in the process of integration. The conclusions of this paper are not geared to show the way the church may help a given member of this minority to assimilate; rather, it is the intention to show how the church, as an institution, may help the entire minority to integrate in a pluralistic society

and become a functional part in the life of the nation.

Importance of the Study

If there is an obvious lack of careful studies about the Mexican-American, one is appalled by the lack of them devoted to the exploration of the role of the Protestant church among this minority. This oversight is partly due to the relatively insignificant number of Mexican-Americans who belong to the Protestant Church. Since this minority is traditionally Roman Catholic in background, one expects to find some studies concerned with the role of the Roman Catholic church among Mexican-Americans; however, even here, the number is extremely low. The influence, directly or indirectly, which the Protestant tradition has exercised over the present movement, requires a careful consideration and exploration of the role of the ethnic church serving this minority in the Protestant tradition. But here again, we know of no such study.

Most papers, written concerning our subject matter, center in the techniques of proselyting or they are surveys describing the social needs of this minority that must be met through the community centers. The present study tries to see the role of the church from the point of view of the Mexican-American who needs acceptance for

what he is, and not for what he may become. Furthermore, there is no systematic study that has tried to take a comprehensive view of the Mexican-American and his relationship with the Protestant Church.

Definition of Terms

The principal terms used in this study are defined here. Other terms appearing in the body of this dissertation are functionally defined as they are used.

Mexican-American

A Mexican-American is a person of Mexican descent residing permanently in the United States. Therefore, the terms Latin-American, Spanish-American, Americans of Mexican descent, when used in the Southwest, are seen as synonymous.

Spanish-Speaking Church

When we refer to the Spanish-Speaking Church we have in mind those protestant churches serving the Mexican-American population in the Southwest. Due to the limitations imposed on us by our data, the term describes appropriately the Spanish-speaking churches in the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations. The term Latin Churches, is used synonymously.

Chicano

Since the word Chicano has appeared recently, and is emotionally connotated, we shall define it separately in the way that this term will be used in this study. A Chicano is a person of Mexican descent, living permanently in the United States, who identifies himself with the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement. In the past, Chicano was a derisive label used against those citizens of Mexican descent. Its appearance as a self-imposed label coincides with the emergence of a young vocal group, mainly college students, that have provided a new vigor to the Mexican-American Movement.

Angloization

Angloization is the process by which a person of a different culture repudiates his traditions and language, and conforms to the "American Way". This concept appears behind respectable sociological studies which support the "Melting Pot" theory in intercultural relations within the United States. Americanization, with its connotations of cultural superiority, is seen as synonymous.

Assimilation

This study follows the definitions of assimilation as given by Robert F. Parks and Ernest W. Burgess which reads as follows: "Assimilation is a process of

interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life."¹ This study sees assimilation as a negative process that requires the loss of cultural identity by the assimilating person.

In a "color conscious" society, assimilation, as defined, is limited to those with light-colored skin. But even if color was removed, while a difference in culture and language persists, little or no assimilation is possible.

Cultural Integration

The usage of this concept follows the definition as given by William Bernard at the Unesco Conference, celebrated in Havana in 1956. Ingegration is seen as the process that takes place when two groups of different cultures meet under one form of government. Such changes that occur may produce assimilation at some levels, but essentially, both groups maintain their cultural identity and language. In the words of Dr. Bernard, cultural integration is the "successful inclu-

¹ Robert F. Parks and Ernest W. Burgess, Introduction to the Science of Sociology (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1921), p. 735.

sion of a group into the existing society" without losing its cultural identity.² This concept stresses the importance of cultural differentiation within a framework of social unity.

A Pluralistic Society

A pluralistic society is a society where different cultures may exist together with some degree of harmony. It requires the recognition of the majority of the uniqueness and worth of the cultural minorities, thus, accepting them as different but equal.

Organization of the Study

The study may be divided into two major sections: one dealing with the Mexican-American, and the other concerned with the Spanish-Speaking Church. The method followed has been to review the literature concerned with the history of the Mexican-American, to analyze the factors contributing to the present situation, and to evaluate today's Movement and trends. The same method was applied when dealing with the Spanish-Speaking Church. Finally, some conclusions were drawn based in a comparison of both.

²W.D. Borrie and others, The Cultural Integration of Immigrants (Paris: UNESCO, 1959), p. 93, citing William Bernard's paper presented to the Havana Conference.

CHAPTER II

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN

Most books dealing with the Mexican-American begin complaining about the lack of literature and research about the Mexican-American. This lack of interest in a minority group, which is the largest with a language other than English in the United States, is to say the least, incomprehensible.

Most of the present available material is only a paraphrasing of what was written by Carey McWilliams,¹ and Ruth D. Tuck,² twenty or more years ago. It is also discouraging to find that the little research done in this area is limited to special areas of interest, and only a few have been concerned in finding the cultural contributions which Mexican-Americans have made in the Southwest.

The Mexican-American in the Southwest preceded the Anglo settlers, but at the same time they are counted among the most recent immigrants. In the words of Carey McWilliams: "The Spanish-speaking is a curious paradox... the group is so old that it has been forgotten and so new

¹Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961).

²Ruth D. Tuck, Not With The Fist (New York: Brace, 1946).

that it has not yet been discovered."³

Then who is the Mexican-American? This question is difficult to answer, mainly because there is no such clear-cut answer. The term, as we mentioned before, is more inclusive, and exclusive, than it intends to be. Statistically speaking, the Mexican-American is counted under Spanish-surname by the U.S. census. But this includes all others who came from Latin America and excludes those women who married Anglos. It is difficult to estimate how many Mexican-Americans there are in the United States. The figures given vary from 2,500,000⁴ to 6,500,000.⁵ These estimates made by responsible scholars show great discrepancy because of the difficulty of singling-out the Mexican-American, many of whom inter-married or lost their names, or for economic purposes have changed it. Furthermore, there are many smaller groups of immigrants that originally came from Spanish-speaking countries other than Mexico, and because of the common language and the simi-

³Carey McWilliams, Brothers Under The Skin (Boston: Little Brown, 1946), p. 113.

⁴E. G. Luna, "Spanish-Speaking People of the Southwest," J. Edward Maseley (ed.) The Spanish-Speaking People of the Southwest, (Los Angeles Council on Spanish-American Work, 1966), p. 2.

⁵Manuel Guerra, "Mexican-Americans: Forgotten Minority?" University of Southern California Daily Trojan, (December 4, 1967), 1.

larity of problems, are grouped under the same label. Therefore, Dr. Manuel Guerra claims that there are 11,500,000 Spanish-speaking persons in the United States (Puerto Rico excluded).⁶

At any rate, there is a sizable amount of Spanish-speaking people in the United States. Furthermore, we can safely affirm that the largest percentage of this minority lives within the Southwestern states: Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. This is the vast strip of land which belonged to Mexico prior to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, something that many Mexican-Americans have never really understood and many more Mexicans have never accepted, much less forgotten.

His Past: The Historical Perspective

Searching for an answer to the question, who is the Mexican-American, will take us to the Spain in the sixteenth century and the Indian civilizations of the American continent. The Mexican-American is a synthesis of an Hispanic amalgam and a mixed Indian heritage, a mixture which

⁶Ibid., p. 1.

⁷George I. Sanchez, "The Culture of the Spanish-Speaking People of the United States." (Mimeographed material, 1963), p. 4.

⁸Ibid., p. 5.

Jose Vasconcelos has referred to as, "La Raza Cosmica" (The Cosmic Race). The Mexican-Americans of the Southwest "are a product of fusion, biologically as well as culturally; their offspring are a result of a blending of cultures of many peoples."⁷

When we consider the Spanish heritage, we cannot find a typical Spaniard. The Spanish, by the time they came to America, were a product of a fusion of many races, biologically, physically, and culturally. Throughout their history, we can observe a continuous merger of different groups with different cultures. The early Iberians were influenced by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, then by the Romans, and later by the Goths and Visigoths (tall, blond, and blue-eyed).⁸ As the years passed, new groups arrived, some through peaceful migration, others through conquest. But during the thirteenth century, we find Moors, Arabic-speaking Moslems, and Jews, living side by side with the Spanish natives. For almost eight-hundred years, such was the picture in Spain. The result was a process of acculturation which left its indelible mark in the Spanish culture

⁷Ibid., p. 4.

⁸Ibid., p. 5.

and language.⁹ It was during this intermingling of cultures and languages that Spain reached its Golden Age and became "as much Non-Western as a Western country."¹⁰

When the Spaniards came to America, they did not find a cultural vacuum. There were about ten million Indians "people who represented a kaleidoscope of cultures, of languages, and degrees of civilizations."¹¹ They did not find one kind of people, but a myriad of peoples. They also found very advanced civilizations, by-products of amalgamation with previous cultures. Speaking of Mexico, primarily, the Spaniards found a vast empire, carved by the Aztecs, but a pluralistic society with towns which pledged allegiance to an emperor, but who differed radically in culture. It was this heterogeneous condition, marked by political divisions, which enabled a small group of soldiers to conquer a vast empire. The different Indian tribes saw in Hernando Cortez and his ill-equipped men the hope of liberation from the Aztec oppression; they could not have been further from the truth.

⁹George I. Sanchez, "History, Culture, and Education", Julian Samora (ed.) La Raza: Forgotten Minority (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), p. 3.

¹⁰Sanchez, "The Culture of the ...," p. 5.

¹¹George I. Sanchez, "Spanish in the Southwest", (Mimeographed material, 1963), p.3.

When the Spaniards came to Mexico, they did not come to colonize, but to conquer, to make a fortune, and then return to Spain and live the life of a caballero among the Spanish nobility. But plans seldom worked out this way. The challenges of the New World and the beauty of its maidens forced these people to settle down and inter-marry with the Indians. Thus, early in the history of New Spain we find the Mestizo, a new breed, product of two mixtures, beginning to emerge. The Mestizo eventually out-numbered the Spaniard, and later the Indian. From the third social level in which he was placed during the colonial period, he was able to move in all directions and soon occupied the entire spectrum of the social scale.¹²

His Character: The Mestizo

Few books have been written probing into the life and character of the Mestizo. But those who have written, although entirely different in approach, have agreed that there is a basic element in the Mexican that separates him from all other ethnic groups. Samuel Ramos calls it

¹²Ernest Gruening, Mexico And Its Heritage (New York: Century, 1928), p. 24. f.

"a feeling of inferiority."¹³ Emilio Uranza prefers to call it a "feeling of inadequacy."¹⁴ Octavio Paz refers to it as "the flight into solitude,"¹⁵ and so on. All of them agree that the Mexican is a product of history, and as such, he must be judged and understood; to do otherwise is to end up with a stereotype, a pitfall that American writers have been unable to avoid in spite of the historical evidence to the contrary.

In trying to explain the Mestizo, one must keep in mind that, biologically, as we have already mentioned, he is the product of an amalgam of European stock and American-Indian stock. But sociologically, he is the product of a series of events that began with the colonization and domination of New Spain by the Spaniards for three hundred years. The Mestizo saw his beginning amidst a society where class lines were rigidly drawn with the Spaniards born in Spain as rulers and controllers of all wealth and prestige. Below the Spaniards, in the colonial social scale, came the Criollos, (improperly translated as Creoles)

¹³Samuel Ramos, Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 17.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁵Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude (London: Grove Press, 1961).

the sons of Spanish parents, but born in New Spain. In this group we found the businessmen, lesser officials, and members of the common clergy. Below them, in third place, we find the Mestizo, looked upon as inferior with no clear group to identify with, rejected by the Spanish and ignored by the Indian; he was a homeless person. Finally, at the end of the caste system, the Indian was placed.

The war of independence in 1810 was the Mestizo's first opportunity to assert himself and claim some dignity. But even here, he came second to the Criollo, who provided the planning, the leadership in the war, and, later, the members for the new ruling class. By the time of the Mexican independence, the Mestizo was the most numerous, and eventually began to occupy important positions in the government. But, in spite of his early enthusiasm, three hundred years of Spanish domination had left the Mestizo completely unprepared to govern himself. The new ruling class looked up to Europe for guidance and direction. Instead of working to create a national culture, they began to import other cultures into the Mexican soil. The Mestizo came to power with the stigma of inferiority, now, as the ruler of an independent nation, compared himself against the European civilization, only to strengthen his

feelings of inadequacy even more.¹⁶

This trend of imitation achieved its climax under the regime of Mexico's true dictator: Porfirio Diaz. Himself a general who had fought for the reformation of Mexican government in 1857, was later elected president by popular vote, and ruled as a dictator for thirty years. Acknowledging the feeling of inferiority, he sought to transplant the French culture into the Mexican soil, but such transplantation never took roots and became artificial. It was not until the Mexican Revolution, which, among other things, was a nationalistic movement caused by the imposition of an alien culture, that the Mestizo began to give his proper place to the Indian "by reinstating him in the national community."¹⁷ It was also during this revolution that modern Mexico emerged. Mexican consciousness as a nation is a new thing; it only goes back to 1910, properly. This date marks the beginning of a new pride among Mexican people, which many have characterized as irrational. Ramos has interpreted this emphasis on national consciousness as an overreaction to a general feeling of inferiority. Ramos, influenced by Adler's psychology, forgets to take into account the

¹⁶Ramos, Op. Cit., p. 56.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 176.

social events that have led to such a pride.

The fact remains that this nationalistic pride has taken a religious fervor. It is inculcated early in childhood and held fast by the adults, who, even when living in a foreign country most of their lives, seldom relinquish their Mexican citizenship. To do so would be considered treason by many.

A recent event which points out this pride was seen in the last Olympic Games, when the students agreed to postpone all demonstrations to allow the Olympic Games to continue, when they were told that a cancellation of the Games would mean the loss of face for Mexico. This decision was taken by the students, even when they knew very well that, strategically, their demonstrations were more effective because of the on-coming Olympic events.

This strong nationalistic consciousness has influenced another social mechanism of defense, as Ramos refers to it, an attitude known as "Machismo"----for which there is no proper translation into English. It is an over-emphasis on the maleness of men, with a decided sexual connotation. The reproductive organs of the male are not only attributed one kind of potency, "the sexual, but every kind of human power."¹⁸ This phallic obsession suggests

¹⁸Ibid., p. 60.

to the Mestizo the idea of power, and not only fecundity or eternal life, as it has been the case in other cultures.

"When a Mexican compares his own personality to the character of a civilized foreigner, he consoles himself in the following way: "A European has science, art, technical knowledge, and so forth; we have none of that here, but... we are very manly." Manly in the zoological sense of the term, that is, in the sense of the male enjoying complete animal potency."¹⁹ Thus, the quality that the Mexican cherishes is courage. A true man must be a man of great courage.

The Mexican has been profoundly affected by a religious sense of life. From his mother, the Indian element, the Mestizo inherited a religious perception of life; from his father, the Spaniard, he received Catholicism at a time when Catholicism was being influenced by a mystical revival in Spain. These two elements were amalgamated and produced a Christian faith that incorporated many Indian beliefs and practices, still observed today.²⁰

Out of this syncretistic religion came two definite

¹⁹Ibid., p. 60.

²⁰Alberto Rembao, Pneuma: Los Fundamentos Teologicos De La Cultura (Mexico: Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1957), p. 101. f. see also William Madsen, The Mexican-American of South Texas (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 58.

elements present in the life of the Mestizo: his reverence for authority and a deep sense of courtesy and respect for the rights of others. The first element was formed under the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered and reinforced by the Indian beliefs in a pre-ordained universe. The same element, strengthened by the Catholic emphasis on the other life, has been turned into a fatalistic view on life which further complicates and adds to the feelings of inadequacy. The second, a by-product of the first, is the positive side of the Mexican soul. This has taken him to stress as high virtues gentility, courtesy and chivalry. These elements are readily seen in the place that the Mexican culture has for the mother, and also in the fact that the patron saint of Mexico is the Virgin de Guadalupe.

The religious sense of life must not be confused with church practices and observances which are seen as the duty of the women.

Closely related to this element we find the Mexican emphasis on Form. "Both our Spanish and Indian heritages have influenced our fondness for ceremonies, formulas, and order. Perhaps our traditionalism, which is one of the constants of our national character, giving coherence to our people and our history results from our professed love

for Form."²¹

Also related to that mentioned above, the Mexican is an introvert. "The Mexican, whether young or old, general or laborer, or lawyer, seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself."²² Emphasis is placed on being closed, stoic in character. "We are taught from childhood to accept defeat with dignity...and if we are not all good stoics, like Juarez and Cuauthemoc, at least we can be resigned and patient and long-suffering. Resignation is one of our most popular virtues. We admire fortitude in the face of adversity more than the most brilliant triumph."²³

These "qualities" found in the Mexican character, reflect an underlying folk culture, where the group had more importance than the individual. They are necessary elements in a society with a communal economy. Perhaps the only true element of the pre-Colombian civilization rediscovered in Mexico and functionally active in its present-day economy is the concept of communal lands. The Ejido,

²¹Paz, Op. Cit., p. 29.

²²Ibid., p. 29.

²³Ibid., p. 31.

a product of the revolutions of 1917, is only a renovation of the Calpulli. "The Calpulli was the basic form of land ownership before the conquest. This system consisted in dividing the populated areas into various suburbs or Calpullis, each of them with a set amount of land. This land did not belong to the inhabitants as individuals, but rather, was granted to a family or tribe...the person who left his Calpulli, or failed to cultivate the land assigned to him, lost his right to share in the communal properties."²⁴ From the Calpulli, or later the Ejido, came the qualities of courtesy and gentility, which in a society based on individualism and personal ownership, are seen as weakness or signs of inferiority.

The introvertness of the Mestizo needs an emotional release from time to time, a catharsis that he achieves through his colorful fiestas. The Mexican calendar is crowded with them, some are religious, others, secular. There are many national holidays which are carefully observed and celebrated throughout the country. But also, every town and city, regardless of size, has its own patron saint, whose day is ceremoniously honored. Every person has two main celebrations: his birthday and his saint's day, or the day when he was baptized. Whether the

²⁴Ibid., p. 141.

fiestas are religious or secular, he takes a different personality during their celebration. He becomes an extrovert. In the words of Octavio Paz: "During these days, the silent Mexican whistles, shouts, sings, shoots off fireworks, discharges his pistol in the air. He discharges his soul."²⁵ Every person who has been in Mexico during a celebration will testify that there is nothing more colorful or joyous than a Mexican fiesta. This kind of release is needed to maintain a balanced personality. Extreme introvertness or complete silence only leads to a psychotic depression.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 has been explained as a national catharsis. It was an extremely popular movement which attracted people, not because of their lofty aims or ideology, but because it provided the emotional release and expansion needed by those people who had lived and suffered in silence.

When the Mestizo immigrates to the United States he passes from a relatively homogeneous community, with a homogeneous culture, to a heterogeneous society with different values and alien customs. The national feeling of inadequacy, to which we refer above, is now internalized.

²⁵Ibid., p. 49.

Considered inferior by the Anglo majority, he begins to believe in an inherent inferiority. His emphasis on Form and courtesy unfit for a competitive system, are seen as lack of initiative. His introvertness is looked upon as passivity and his fiestas are interpreted as a sign of moral degradation.

To accomodate himself to the new culture he is forced to strive for new goals, even when he lacks the culturally prescribed means of attaining them. The resulting conflict forces him to take either one of three alternatives: 1) he attempts a quick assimilation and rejects his culture, a path often thwarted by prejudice. 2) He may attempt a synthesis of both cultures, adding tension to his daily life or falling into a compartamentalization of his personality. 3) Finally, he tries to maintain his original culture.

The majority of Mexican-American immigrants take the last alternative. They seek security in the preservation of well-known forms of behavior. While he lives in the farm or in a segregated community he is able to create a "Little Mexico." But as he moves to the city the demands of urban life and his inter-action with the Anglo culture results in conflict. This conflict is better perceived in the children who are forced to live in a different, and at times contradictory environment. Margaret Mead, analyzing

the effects of such conflict, points to four main results:

1) Children grow up with a situational or tentative attitude toward life; they neither seek nor expect coherence. 2) Cultural heterogeneity is associated with a tendency to reduce values to some simple quantitative scale. 3) The capacity to organize experience in a heterogeneous community is replaced by an interpretation of the outside world as something atomized into thousands of unrelated bits....No embracing moral philosophy exists that would relate specificities to a single system of value. 4) A child learns to see the world as fragmented into unrelated bits so the covert areas of his personality are unsystematically fragmented, incoherent, less secure in their integration, less able to resist strain, and responsive to the propagandist who promises a coherent world.²⁶

If the immigrant opts to reject his culture and assimilates into the new society he often undergoes a period of personality disintegration, made especially acute by the negative feelings that he encounters in a "color conscious" society. In a study run by Irwin A. Hallowell on the Flambeau Indians, he found that the acculturation process had created a situation in which the personality structure of the natives was in the process of breaking down, rather than undergoing reintegration in any new or positive form.²⁷

When we take a comprehensive view of the Mexican-American and his personality, we find minor adjustments even in the second and third generations. That he has been

²⁷Irving A. Hallowell, "Values, Acculturation and Mental Health" in Bernard J. Siegel (ed.) Acculturation Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955, p. 183.

able to remain relatively unchanged is due to the persistence of his culture to which we address ourselves below.

His Culture: Folkloric

The Rural Scene

The culture of the Mexican-American reflects its Spanish and Indian heritage, and its agricultural environment. Since most of the present-day Mexican-Americans are either the products of the early agricultural society of Mexican California or the rural society of the immigrants who came from Mexico from the small towns to work in the fields, they have preserved a folk culture.

Just as in any folk culture, the family is the most important institution in the Mexican-American society. The unity within the family presents a great advantage for a farming group where the whole family has assigned responsibilities. Within the family structure we can find two main divisions: the nucleus family, and the extended family. In the extended family the grandparents, married brothers and sisters, and first, and even second cousins, are part of this clan. This extended group fulfills most of the social life of the Mexican-American. All fiestas and special occasions are celebrated together. In many places, the sons build their houses in the same lot where their parents home is located, to keep the family united.

The first loyalty of the individual is to his family. If he remains loyal, he can always depend on them for help. The major decisions are made by the males in consultation with the other males of the extended family and with the approval of the grandfather, if he remains as head of the family.

Then we have the nucleus family, composed of the parents, children, and one of two grandparents. In the nucleus family, the roles are well defined and all the members are expected to live within such roles to avoid conflict. Like in most rural cultures, the structure of the family follows patriarchal lines. The father is the head of the family and he is expected to make all of the important decisions. He is the sole provider, except in farm work where all of the family is employed. Yet, the father remains as the one who has the last word in all things pertaining to the job and salary of each of the family members.

The mother is expected to manage the household, to provide for the comfort of the children and husband, to teach the graces of good living to the youngsters, and to take care of the religious life of the family. Since the corporal punishment is left to the father, the mother also becomes the intermediary between the children and the father.

The brothers have the responsibility of taking care of their younger brothers and protecting their sisters. In the case of the death of the father, the oldest brother is expected to take his place as the provider and head of the family. In the case of the mother's death, the oldest sister will take her place. This takes place within the structure of the nucleus family, if no grandmother is living in the household.

Children are very important in the Mexican-American family; they are seen as the continuation of the family in the future, as well as the supporters of the parents when they become disabled because of illness or old age. Children grow in a highly permissive atmosphere until they reach their twelfth birthday, or the onset of puberty. At this time, they are expected to take their roles within the family for which they have been trained. Under a prevailing double standard, caused by a patriarchal system, the boys are encouraged to move outside of the family for their social contacts. In contrast, the girls are constantly being observed and reminded that their role is to stay in the home, where they learn the necessary skills of homemaking. Since chastity before marriage is of paramount importance for the girls, dating takes place under the close supervision of a chaperon and seldom outside of the girl's home. In contrast, the boys move freely in the neighbor-

hood and organize in groups known as the palomillas. These are "loosely-knit play associations"²⁸ where the socializing of the youngster takes place. The name palomillas, means moths who gather around a lightbulb in the evening, in the same way that a group of boys gather.

The palomillas may be composed of as few as three boys, and a youngster may belong to more than one palomilla. Since sex instruction in the home is rare, the palomilla becomes the place where terminology and techniques are discussed. "Palomillas are respected institutions that are not to be confused with the 'pachuco' gangs found in the large cities of the United States."²⁹

Since children grow up with the knowledge that they are expected to take care of their parents in their old age, the place of old people is well defined in the family structure. It is very common to have the widowed parent move in with his son or daughter to live. Sometimes the pressures of city life or prolonged illness forces the children to commit their aging parents to rest homes. They do so with great hesitancy and guilt feelings. There is,

²⁸Op. Cit., p. 54.

²⁹Margaret Clark, Health in the Mexican-American Culture (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959) p. 145.

within the Mexican culture, a high respect for old age, which represents wisdom, although not necessarily knowledge.

"The compadre system is one of the strongest Mexican culture patterns....it plays a major role in fostering and maintaining the social stability of the community by creating new ties in the network of social relationships that bind group members together."³⁰ Part of the extended family, but not related by family ties, is the compadrazgo. Close friends of the family are invited to be witnesses in the baptismal ceremony of the children. By becoming god-parents, they also become the compadres, and acquire the responsibility for the doctrinal and religious education of the child, and complete responsibility for him in the case of the death of both parents. There are other kinds of compadres, like confirmation and marriage, but the most important are the baptismal witnesses, who are now given a special place among the friends of the family and at times seen as an integral part of it.

The Urban Scene

The structure of the family which we have described applies to the rural family. When the family moves into the city, many changes take place, as the need of accomo-

³⁰Ibid., p. 158.

dating to the new situation arises. However, some studies have shown the persistence of certain of the elements and relationships that characterize the rural family, even when such elements are no longer useful or stand in contradiction with those of the larger urban society.³¹

Although the nucleus family overshadows the extended family in the city, the division is more geographical than psychological in nature. The relatives still meet together for the social gatherings or feel confident enough to drop in at any time for dinner, help, or companionship. Nevertheless, the nucleus family develops new acquaintances and tends to drift apart from the clan. The patriarchal authoritarian structure of the family has also persisted in the urban situation, but has been highly resented by the children, who are being exposed to a more democratic relationship in the Anglo family. This has increased the generation gap and strongly undermined the authority of the father. The real clash has come with the change in dating behavior of the girls, who want the same freedom they see in their Anglo counterparts. Most of the "acculturated" parents who let their daughters date without a chaperon are condemned by the other Mexican-Americans

³¹Julian Samora and Richard A. Lamanna, Mexican-American In A Midwest Metropolis: A Study Of East Chicago (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p.27.

who have not gone that far. But most urban families have been forced to compromise, to maintain certain balance and harmony within the family.

The compadrazgo continues in the urban situation but is restricted only to the baptismal godparents and the relationship is more informal.

When all things are taken into consideration, the urban family resembles the rural family in many ways, but it is undergoing significant changes. The patriarchal authoritarian system has prevailed, but it is under constant challenge and some radical modifications are already seen in the second or third generation families. There are other traits, like the extended family and the role of the grandparents who are being challenged, but they have undergone little noticeable change.

At this point we feel the need for more studies on the urban family to account for the effects of such changes. In the urban scene there is a disproportionally high number of single men. Most of them are recent immigrants in their early twenties.³² This high percentage of males in the barrios has put a high "premium on the relatively few Mexican women in the region, and this frequently leads to

³²Ibid., p. 28.

violence over women."³³ However, the majority of the recent immigrants prefer wives from Mexico who conform to "the more traditional female role." Thus, there is a constant immigration of young females brought into the country by men who go down to Mexico for a visit and return married.

"The inbalanced sex ratio, the laws and customs of the United States, the entrance of Mexican women into industry, the education of Mexican children in American schools, and the encounter with American culture in general, are all sources of strain on the traditional attitudes and relationships among Mexican immigrants."³⁴ Add to these elements the disintegrating influences of the ghetto environment, with high unemployment, poor and dilapidated housing, and the discriminatory practices of the large society and the resulting conflict has, at times, shattered the family. To survive in such unfriendly environment, the family often constitutes itself in the major institutional structure that defends the traditional values against the encroachments of the American society.

There is a marked difference between the lower

³³Ibid., p. 28.

³⁴Ibid., p. 29.

class Mexican-American family, which tries to retain the rural structure intact, successfully or unsuccessfully, in the city, and the middle-class Mexican-American family who tries to adopt the Anglo pattern. Nevertheless, there are certain persistent trends from the rural culture which have stubbornly remained, although modified, even in the highly acculturated middle-class. These are: the extended family, with its compadrazgo; the double standard, between male and female; and the parental control. The same persistent trends are the major areas of conflict at the present time within the Mexican-American family.

His Beliefs

Since beliefs are an intrinsic part of any culture, because they determine the way that a person sees, and is affected by his environment; we shall proceed to discuss the religion of the Mexican-American in this chapter.

The Mexican has been catalogued as a deeply religious person.³⁵ The great Indian civilizations that flourished in the Mexican soil were born around certain religious ideas and practices. The Aztecs became a powerful empire through the well-organized army which they developed very early in their history. However, the im-

³⁵Paz, Op. Cit., p. 56.

portance of the army in the national structure was often justified by their religion, which called upon periodical wars. The whole Aztec society was based on a religious structure, beginning with the emperor, considered as the descendent of the gods; down to the common people. In the Mayan civilization, the centers of learning and scientific research were all an integral part of the daily functions of the priests.

Roman Catholicism came to Mexico with the Spanish conquistadores. The defeat of the Indian nations also meant the defeat of their gods. Thus, as conquered people, they bowed to the Christianizing efforts of the early missionaries. The army conquered the Aztec empire, but the church consolidated the different tribes under one religion and one king. Hubert Herring's observation is still very relevent today: though "the last Spanish flag in America has long since been hauled down....the faith of the mother country remains the most tenacious bond among Spain's former vassals."³⁶

Many historians have marveled at the easiness with which the Indians were converted to Roman Catholicism.³⁷

³⁶Hubert Herring, A History of Latin America (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 169.

³⁷Ibid., p. 171.

The early records show thousands of baptisms being performed every day. Friar Motolinia, an eye witness, reports that "a single priest would, in one day, baptize four, five or six thousand...."³⁸

To pledge allegiance to the Spanish crown and the religion of the conquerors was the expected reaction for the Indians; but to change their religious beliefs proved to be somewhat more difficult. The early missionaries saw the necessity of accomodating the Catholic rituals alongside the pagan practices of the Indians, in the hope that further religious training would erase such practices by the second generation. The defeat of the reformation spirit, prevalent in the early missionaries, and the institution of the Inquisition throughout the Spanish empire, changed the atmosphere from one of limited freedom, to one of rigid preservation of the structure, as received. This also caused the clergy to forget the hope of the early missionaries and to abandon their educational work. The later conflicts between the church and the state, which ended in the nationalization of all church properties and the expulsion of foreign Catholic clergy, left the church with a tremendous shortage of trained leadership, and

³⁸Motolinia, quoted by Gruening, Op. Cit., p. 229.

generated an attitude of indifference among the middle-class people; thus, syncretism prevailed. What made this syncretism easier was the remarkable similarity in religious practices between the two religions. Father Sahagun reports that the practices among the Indians included the use of incense in their worship, holy oils, holy water, penitence, fasting, confession, absolution, charms, amulets, and scapulars.³⁹ What made conversion of the Indians even easier, and the task of educating them on the Christian faith harder, was the similarities in their basic beliefs. The Indians believed in a Creator who, through his own will, brought order from chaos, making the land, the seas and the heavens. They also affirmed that this God made Quetzalcoatl with his own breath. Furthermore, the practice of canonization in the Catholic church had its counterpart in the Indian religion. The early missionaries took advantage of these similarities and began to substitute the idols with the Catholic saints. Thus, we find that, even today, the Indians call the saints in their own native tongue, by the name of their former gods. As early as 1531, only a decade after the conquest, the story of the apparition of the Virgin de Guadalupe was introduced by Bishop of Mexico, Juan Zumarraga. It is

³⁹Ibid., p. 232.

interesting to note that the Virgin appeared in the hill of Tepeyac, a holy place for the Indians, which was the abode of the Goddess Tonatzin, who was greatly revered throughout the empire.⁴⁰ Also significant, is the fact that she appeared to an Indian, Juan Diego, and that she did not have a child, as other virgins did. For many generations, the Virgin de Guadalupe was known as Tonatzin and great pilgrimages still come from all over Mexico on the twelfth of December, just as they used to in the days of the Aztec empire. Before the conquest, every town had a special god as protector, whose day was celebrated with great festivities. The early missionaries substituted these gods with saints. Now every town has a patron saint whose day is still celebrated in the ancient fashion. These early practices by the missionaries were considered a remarkable accomplishment. However, they only helped to perpetuate the polytheistic beliefs of the early Aztecs. Even the religious days were made to coincide with the Indian celebrations. Thus, we find today that "All Saints Day" is also called the "Day of the Dead" and the cemeteries are adorned with yellow flowers, and many varieties of food are taken to the tombs. Altars are raised in all the houses where the dead will come to participate once a

⁴⁰ Rembao, Op. Cit., p. 101.

year in the life of the family. "All Saint's Day," says Gruening, "is a continuation of the ancient worship of Teoyaominqui or Teomique."⁴¹

A common sight today is to find Indian dancers, dressed in colorful clothes and adorned with feathers, dancing in front of the Catholic church, as part of the religious festivities. The result of the early practices of the missionaries, the lack of proper religious instruction of the colonial church, and the stormy history of the Catholic church during the war of independence, and later, in their struggle with the liberals, has resulted in a syncretistic religion. It is a mixture of sixteenth century Catholicism and Indian beliefs and practices. It has been only since the Vatican Council II that a new attempt to bring drastic reforms in the Roman Catholic church in Mexico is taking place. It represents an attempt to bring her in contact with the advances of Catholicism in other countries, but such attempt has met much resistance and overt opposition.

This is the type of Catholicism that the Mexican-American brought into the United States, a religion accepted by all but practiced by few. Along with Indian beliefs, came many magic practices that are generally ac-

⁴¹ Gruening, Op. Cit., p. 240.

cepted today among lower-class Mexicans. Madsen makes an exhaustive study of these beliefs and practices of the Mexican-American in relation to sickness and health.⁴² These, however, are disappearing where modern medicine is available. However, the presence of a few stores located in the Mexican community in Los Angeles that specialize in herbs, affirms that these customs are still present, even among the urbanized Mexicans.

Catholicism has not paid much attention to the Mexican-Americans. In the past it only provided churches for them to worship, but little time was taken for their proper instruction; and a few, or no social services were offered. It has been only recently that the Catholic church has established a number of voluntary organizations and social service centers that provide aid to the immigrants, as well as, to the general public. Their recent efforts to change traditional syncretistic beliefs have met with decided resistance among the less educated class. Madsen points out that the sermons of the priest that urges the people to "abandon their superstition and accept church dogma," are politely listened to but ignored."⁴³

⁴²Madsen, Op. Cit., p. 68, ff.; see also Clark, Op. Cit., p. 163.

⁴³Madsen, Op. Cit., p. 58.

Many writers have commented about the religious character of the Mexican-American and his great devotion to his faith, yet such devotion does not show in actual church attendance. Most churches are only frequented by the women, the old, and the children. "Adolescents, young adults, and males in general, are likely to be indifferent, but will not relinquish their bond to the church."⁴⁴ Thus, we find a minority that puts great emphasis on religion, but remains only nominally Catholic. Church attendance is irregular or circumscribed to special events or religious ceremonies, yet every home has an altar and most persons carry medals engraved with religious saints or the effigy of the virgin.

Pilgrimages are constantly made to the different altars across the Southwest, inspired by a mystical devotion to the Virgin de Guadalupe.⁴⁵

Thus, we can conclude with Sophia Robinson, that "in the Mexican-American, religion is associated with all life experience....and is much more potent a force in the Mexican than in a typical white (Anglo) American family."⁴⁶

⁴⁴Samora, Op. Cit., p. 47.

⁴⁵Madsen, Op. Cit., p. 60.

⁴⁶Sophia M. Robinson, Juvenile Delinquency (New York: Holt, 1969), p. 175 (*Italics not in the text*).

His History In The United States

It is amazing to find out how the history of the Mexican-American in the Southwest is so grossly ignored. Little or nothing is said about the early colonies in the Southwest in the elementary, junior or high schools.

The romanticized Spanish culture of the Southwest, as told and preserved in the names of towns or streets, or in the fiesta celebrations of towns like Santa Barbara, reflects a superficial knowledge of the Mexican heritage of the Southwest.⁴⁷ Such lip service to a romanticized past explains the harsh, open or subtle, discrimination to which the Mexican-American has been subjected to since the early formation of the Anglo settlements within the pueblos.

Nevertheless, the Mexican-American has roots in this country which go farther back than those of the early pilgrims or the settlement of Plymouth. The oldest settlement of Europeans in the mainland, of what is now the United States, was St. Augustine Florida, founded in 1565. The Southwest properly traces its beginning to the early settlement of the villages north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, founded in 1598.

⁴⁷ Beatrice Griffith, American Me (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 91.

It is New Mexico which has the honor of being the first state to be colonized in what is now the Continental United States. It was Juan de Onate, one of the richest men of Mexico, who left his hometown, Zacatecas, in 1548, and moved north to colonize New Mexico "with eighty-three carretas, seven thousand head of stock and four-hundred soldiers."⁴⁸

By 1630 the colonists had managed to establish twenty-five missions. However, this fact is ignored and nowhere does it appear in the history of the United States, claiming that the first settlement was Plymouth Rock; thus, failing to recognize the Spanish settlements as legitimate.

In 1687, Father Eusebio Francisco Kino founded the Mission of San Xavier Del Boc in Arizona, and for twenty-four years Father Kino served Arizona, traveling across the state and the northern part of Sonora and Chihuahua.

By 1716, a few missions were established in the eastern part of Texas; these, however, were later abandoned due to the ferocity of the Indian raids. Nevertheless, by 1748 a few successful settlements took place along the Rio Grande and later a few towns began to appear

⁴⁸McWilliams, North From Mexico p. 24.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 24.

deep into the state of Texas: Dolores, 1761; Rio Grande City in 1757.

California came a little later in the colonization movement. It had been explored as early as 1542 when "Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo set sail up the west coast of Mexico to find the fabled island of California, peopled by black women, on the right hand of the Indies, very close to the Terrestrial Paradise."⁴⁹ California, however, was not colonized until the arrival of Fray Junipero Serra at San Diego in 1769. But in a few years, a chain of missions appeared throughout the coast of California, and later some towns emerged adjacent to these missions. Thus, the towns of San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco were established in the 1770's, and later the two pueblos: San Jose in 1777; and Los Angeles in 1781.⁵⁰

These are the early towns and settlements of the Southwest. They were founded under the Spanish Crown, but not necessarily or completely by Spaniards, as it is generally believed. This romanticism of the past, preserved and encouraged in the pageants and parades, was born out of a necessity of affirming that the Southwest had a

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 25.

European link in its colonization. Nowhere is the Mexican heritage evoked, except by the Mexican-American writers. The Anglo population finds greater satisfaction in creating and preserving a myth to make sure that the great cities of the Southwest were founded by Spaniards and not Mexicans or Mestizos.

The fact remains that most cities of the Southwest were founded similarly to Los Angeles. El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora de Los Angeles was chartered by ten men whose names appear in the charter, all of them good Spanish names: Pablo Rodriguez; Jose Variegas; Jose Moreno; Felix Villavicencio; Jose de Lara; Antonio Mesa; Basilio Rosas; Alejandro Rosas; Antonio Navarro; and Manuel Carnero. However, just as in New Spain, and later in Independent Mexico, a name is not used and cannot be used for racial or national identification. Thus, Pablo Rodriguez was not a Spaniard, but an Indian; Jose Variegas, first mayor of Los Angeles, was also an Indian; Jose Moreno was a mulatto (and perhaps this is why he chose the name Moreno); Antonio Mesa, a Negro; Basilio Rosas, an Indian married to a mulatto; Alejandro Rosas, an Indian; Antonio Navarro, a Mestizo married to a mulatto. Of all the twelve settlers, only two were Spaniards: Jose de Lara, married to an Indian; and Felix Villavicencio, also married to an Indian.⁵¹

⁵¹Ibid., p. 36.

The towns experienced their major early growth under the Mexican Republic. Beatrice Griffith has accurately affirmed: "Mexicans have pioneered this country in the truest sense of the word. They, like other pioneers, came here in ox carts. They had their fights with the Indians. They hunted gold," they built towns and, yet, the Anglo continues to refer to the early founders as Spaniards and proclaim their Spanish heritage.⁵²

Since the early colonization of the Southwest, there has been a constant migration of people who had moved north from Mexico. Even after the forced concession of the entire Southwest to the United States, Mexican families kept moving back and forth from Chihuahua, Sonora, Tamaulipas to Texas, Arizona, California and New Mexico without any hesitation. This type of life on both sides of the border was not affected until the Anglos began to "colonize" and carve their land empires at the expense of the original settlers across the Southwest. The present borders do not follow natural barriers; thus, it was difficult to know that coming from Sonora to Arizona, one had stepped into a different country.

The exception to this constant migration of people from Mexico to the southwestern states was New Mexico,

⁵²Griffith, Op. Cit., p. 91

which lived isolated from the other settlements from 1598 to 1820, because of the Indian control of the territory. It is for this reason, and not the one usually given, that the early settlers were only Spaniards; that New Mexico had preserved archaic Spanish customs. Nevertheless, their heritage, their culture, and even their food, is identical to that of other settlers of the Southwest who came from Mexico. That the present day New Mexicans claim Spanish ancestry while most of them can be traced to a Mexican origin is due to the discrimination practiced by Anglos against the Mexican. By tracing their ancestry to the Spaniards they become of European stock, a "must" in our society for complete assimilation. The new generation is beginning to assert its proper heritage because, in spite of their European claims, they have been rejected by the Anglo society.⁵³

Prior to the Mexican-American War, the mines of Arizona were being exploited by Mexicans. These mines were later abandoned during the period of the Mexican-American War when, taking advantage of the prevalent confusion, the Apaches raided the mining towns and forced its occupants to leave. But, right after the war ended and

⁵³Antonio Mondragon, "Hope of Mexican-Americans: Reies Tijerina" La Raza: Barrio Communications Project Los Angeles, 1: 12 (May 11, 1968), 12.

the news of gold discoveries reached Sonora, thousands of miners migrated and filled the mines throughout California. Mining, as McWilliams points out,⁵⁴ was not a quality of Anglo residents. Thus, immigration of Mexicans was encouraged as they became a needed element for the exploitation of the mines. The names of the mining towns, Sonora, Hornitos, and the Spanish terminology that is still used in mining, is a living memory of these Mexicans who migrated during the years following the Mexican-American War. The mining industry in the Southwest, even in the nearby states like Nevada and Utah, was made possible because of early Mexican mining discoveries, their experience and ingenuity, their knowledge and sheer strength.

The Mexicans were accomplished shepherds and excellent Vaqueros; and they were the first ones to introduce these two industries in the Southwest. Once the Anglo conquest of the Southwest took place, he took over these two industries. But even though the owners were now Anglos, they depended on the knowledge of the Mexicans for the smooth operation of their new possessions. Thus, there was a constant in-flow of Mexicans to this country. The great migration of Mexicans to the Southwest arrived when the

⁵⁴McWilliams, North From Mexico, p. 133.

railroads were laid. "From that day to this," writes McWilliams, "Mexicans have built, repaired, and maintained Western rail lines."⁵⁵

When Texas changed from cattle to cotton, and the need for cheap labor was experienced in a place that only had a handful of slaves, the growers turned to the Mexicans and encouraged their immigration. During the depression, as many as four-hundred-thousand Mexicans, were following the cotton crops around Texas.⁵⁶ As the cotton invaded the fields of Arizona and California, the Mexicans from across the border followed, lured either by the big talk of their friends who returned home after the season ended, or, more often, by the false promises of the land owners.

Most of the Mexican-American families living in Los Angeles, at some time or another worked on the railroad. Whole towns or communities have been established by Mexicans, who, after living in railroad cars, decided to settle down. Watts was founded in 1906, when the Railroad Company built rowhouses on its property and rented it to company employees. "Thirty or forty such camps are still to be found in the Los Angeles County."⁵⁷

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 167, see also Griffith, Op.Cit., p. 92.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 172.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 169.

In 1902, the U.S. government passed the Reclamation Act which allowed for federal help in the development of irrigations in the Southwest. With the improvement of irrigation, semi-arid valleys became green fields, where produce crops were raised. In the development of these produce crops, the Mexicans also were a decisive factor, although a degrading one, providing the manpower at low cost needed for financial success. Thus, the San Joaquin Valley, Imperial Valley in California, and the lower Rio Grande Valley---where temperatures of 100, 110, 112, are common during harvest time, encouraged Mexican immigration.

McWilliams writes: "Those who have never visited the copper mines of Morenci in July, or the cotton fields of San Joaquin Valley in September, or the cantaloupe fields of Imperial Valley in June, are hardly in a position to even imagine what Mexican workers have endured in these areas."⁵⁸

Another powerful industry of the Southwest that required cheap labor and encouraged Mexicans to cross the border was the sugar beet. During the blocking and thinning in the spring and the harvest in the fall, the great beet companies contracted Mexican families. Once again the border towns became the centers of recruitment and the

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 177.

Mexican communities were systematically enlarged at the end of the season, where Mexicans took refuge and waited for the next crop to be ready. Denver owes its early growth in the Mexican-American community to the best areas of Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. In the same way, San Antonio became a manpower pool for the Mid-Western areas.

Taking all these factors into consideration, the immigration of the Mexicans was greatly increased between the years 1900 and 1940, when the agriculture in the United States was "industrialized."

This immigration was by necessity very selective. The need for farm work, whether in cotton or the beet fields, or the need for strength and endurance in the railroad, were the decisive elements that brought about the selectivity of this immigration.

The invention of machinery for harvesting the beets and picking the cotton drastically reduced the constant in-flow, but could not stop immigration completely. The greed of some employers, i.e., California grape growers, has continued to encourage this immigration. The immigration laws and border officials have been unsuccessful in checking the illegal entrance of Mexicans along the border. People come lured by the tales of their friends or by the promises of "coyotes," company agents who recruit people across the border. These people fall into

the exploitive hands of the unscrupulous growers, who take advantage of their illegal entry and work them hard under very unhealthy conditions and paying low wages. These phrases are not only applied to growers, but also to factories in the metropolitan areas, where long shifts and low wages are very common, and where most of the workers are illegal immigrants from Mexico.

Last year I met a person who had entered illegally to this country through Tijuana and was working in a factory six days a week, ten hours a day, making thirty-five dollars a week. When she asked for a raise, she was threatened with deliverance to the immigration department, which meant expulsion from the United States.

After industry supplied the machinery that cut down the need for cheap labor and the immigration department stepped-up the war against illegal entrance, the high birth rate continued to increment the number of Mexican-Americans in the United States. Coming from a rural folk culture, where the extended family is cherished, coupled with a Catholic background opposed to contraception, and the highly-regarded place that children occupy in the Mexican tradition, the Mexican-American in the United States is the group with the highest birth rate.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Rembao, Op. Cit., p. 83.

Legally or illegally, the Mexican was the vital factor in the development of the agricultural and industrial enterprise in the Southwest. This is a factor known by the government, but rarely mentioned and largely ignored by the majority of the population which claims that the prosperity of the Southwest is solely due to "Yankee ingenuity and industry." This lack of recognition where honor is due is nothing new when it comes to the Mexican. He discovered the gold in California, brought his knowledge to the mining industry; he was the number one sheepman and cowman for many years prior to the Anglo occupation of the Southwest, and long after. He laid down the railroads, vital to the development of this region. He provided the adaptable man-power under severe conditions to the semi-arid regions of the Southwest, and after four-hundred years of dedicated service, he is still seen as the "foreigner", the passive and undesirable character of the Southwest who must be returned to Mexico.

CHAPTER III

THE PRESENT

The Mexican-Americans are a conquered people, as McWilliams very assertedly points out: "The Mexicans were annexed by conquest, along with the territory they occupied, and in effect, their cultural autonomy was guaranteed by a treaty."¹ They have retained their religion and their tradition, in the same way as the French-Canadians have held on to theirs, or as any other group which has been annexed by conquest. Their tenacity in holding onto their language and culture was the outcome of many factors of which self-identity and forced segregation have been paramount.

It is surprising to find people, who after many years and several generations, still refer to themselves as "nosotros los Mexicanos" (we the Mexicans). This does not necessarily imply an allegiance to the country of Mexico, for the Mexican-Americans have more than proved their loyalty to the United States in their heroic participation in the two World Wars, being the most decorated

¹Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961), p. 207.

minority.² Their Mexicanism, if it can be called that, is more cultural than national, an identity that has roots in the early beginnings of the Southwest.

Never has the Mexican considered himself a foreigner even recent immigrants see the Southwest as the other part of Mexico taken forcefully by the United States. This land belonged to their grandparents, thus it also belongs to them.

The question which is often asked is, why do the Mexican-Americans persist in their own ways; why haven't they assimilated as other minorities have done? To answer this question we shall point to the discrimination and isolation to which the Mexican-American has been forced to live in since the coming of the Anglo to the Southwest.

As early as 1830, when traders began to visit the Southwest, we can find the beginnings of the Mexican stereo-type. Coming from a different tradition and judging the early people through the lenses of their own culture, these early travelers found the natives idle, thriftless, and degraded. Coming from a background of puritans, the fiestas seemed to them as close to the Roman orgies as they had ever seen. Being used to a competitive, individualis-

²La Raza Unida (Findings from the discussion groups, San Antonio, Texas: Mexican-American Unity Conference, 1968), p. 6.

tic society, the cooperative and communal activities of the natives were mis-interpreted as laziness. Coming from a highly industrious society they could not understand a folk culture preserved by isolation and created by a hostile terrain; thus, they classified the Mexican as inferior. What is amazing is that these early views, written by simple, and many times ignorant, traders, became the stereotype accepted by most Anglos coming to the Southwest, even when the contrary was obvious.

A close look into the early history of the Anglo colonization of the Southwest helps one to understand the readiness and the persistence of the stereo-type. The treacherous way by which the land and property of the Mexican residents were acquired by the Anglo needed a concept that would justify such action. Accepting the Mexican as inferior provided the needed excuse.

Along with the writings of the early travelers we find the "Manifest Destiny" idea that generally prevailed with the Anglos at the time of the conquest of the Southwest. This political ideology also helped to justify the injustices committed against Mexico and the residents of the conquered land.

The further segregatory practices of the new land owners prevented the proper acculturation of this minority. Early after the conquest Mexicans became the main source of

of cheap labor for the growers of the Southwest. Isolated "camps" or little colonies were conveniently removed and established away from the main towns, thus little or no social interaction took place between Anglos and Mexicans. Mining towns, even today, remain as segregated communities. In the major cities, the Mexican communities did not grow following a sociological event, they were planned and placed far enough from the city as to maintain separate schools, recreational areas, theaters, etc.³

One would expect that with the acquisition of knowledge, discrimination would cease to exist, but such has not been the case. The discrimination to which the Mexicans were subjected to in the early days of the Anglo invasion, reached grotesque magnitude during the 1940's, and continues to play a very important role in the relationship of the Anglo and Mexican communities.

The abortive case of the sleeping lagoon of the 1940's has found its counterpart in the 1950's. The practices of the police in the 1930's have continued until the present, with little change. The raid of 1942 and the inditelements of Mexicans by the Grand Jury have found a recent parallel in the inditement of the thirteen community lea-

³McWilliams, op. cit., p. 213 f.

ders whose case is now pending in the courts.⁴

It has been this persistent discrimination, openly hostile or subtle, but equally damaging, that has divided the Mexican population in three groups: 1) A section of second, third, and fourth generations that claim Spanish blood, thus calling themselves Spanish-Americans, and display a great contempt for all things that are Mexican;⁵ 2) a group that tries to deny and forget their heritage, emphasizing their Americanism, refusing to be called by any other name but "American"; and a 3) third group of people who, proud of their heritage, in spite, or because of discrimination, want to be called Mexican, or lately, Chicanos. Divided as they are, this minority is far from acquiring the unity and victories which the Black community has won.

Along with the discrimination that "puts the Mexican in his place", the proximity of Mexico and the continuous re-inforcement of the Mexican ranks in the United States are powerful elements that have arrested acculturation. Mexico, a country that has flourished in the last half-cen-

⁴La Raza Yearbook (Los Angeles: Barrio Communications Project, 1968), p. 38.

⁵Joan W. Moore and Frank G. Mittelbach, Residential Segregation of Minorities in the Urban Southwest (Los Angeles: University of California, 1967), p. 17.

tury, is proud and nationalistic. Therefore, the constant immigration from across the border is a powerful Mexicanizing element that keeps the Mexican-American oriented toward the Mexican culture. Dr. Sanchez has suggested that the border of Mexico be closed, at least for a short time, to allow for acculturation.⁶ But as long as discrimination along color lines is practiced in this country the cessation of immigration will not achieve acculturation. Proof of this is the Mexicanism present among the second or third generation youth who are supposed to be the most acculturated.

Housing

Residentially, the Mexican-American has been segregated in the past and is still being segregated today. The barrios were not products of social mobility, they were planned spots where the Spanish-speaking population was placed. Most of the present-day communities grew around the railroad camp settlements, or the agricultural colonies, created to be within a convenient distance from the city, not so far that the ready availability of cheap labor was difficult to obtain but not so close as to bring about social participation and inter-action between commu-

⁶George I. Sanchez, The Spanish in the Southwest (mimeographed material, 1963), p. 11.

nities.⁷

Even in cities like Los Angeles, "much of the housing is segregated and sub-standard. The Mexican rents for more and gets less for his money and the house he lives in is, more often than not, deteriorating."⁸ In some cities, like in Colorado and California, the railroad tracks remain as the physical dividing line between Anglo and Spanish-speaking communities. In 1964, the executive director of the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations testified that the "City of Los Angeles in particular is becoming a much more highly segregated community than it has ever been before."⁹

The only great change in housing among Mexican-Americans is that eighty percent of them are now living in cities, creating a shortage in housing and pushing the land value upwards, in spite of the deteriorated conditions. Many of these communities have been excluded from the usual municipal services. Glick comments that in "Weslaco, Texas the Spanish-speaking residential area, north of the railroad tracks, has almost no paved streets, side-walks, or

⁷Moore and Mittelbach, op. cit., p. 10.

⁸Arturo S. Almanza, "Mexican-Americans and Civil Rights" (Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, mimeographed, 1964), p. 3.

⁹Lawrence B. Glick, "The Right to Equal Opportunity" in Julian Samora (ed.) La Raza: Forgotten Minority (London: University of Notre Dame, 1966), p. 107.

curbing. A similar situation prevails in Crystal City, Texas, and in Catulla, located in the Upper Rio Grande Valley."¹⁰ The same occurs in Hicks Camp, located in the heart of the City of El Monte.

Writing about the Chavez Ravine Community, situated within a walking distance from City Hall, Carey McWilliams in 1948 states: "For forty years or more, the section has been without most of the ordinary municipal services.... the streets are unpaved...garbage is usually collected from a central point, when it is collected, and the service is not equal to that which can be obtained in Anglo districts bordering the Ravine."¹¹ Ten years later, in 1958, the city found the way to "improve" the community. The whole area was closed, the houses condemned, the residents expelled and paid a meager amount for their homes, which could not buy any other houses, except in a similar or worse district and in their place one of the most beautiful base-ball parks in Los Angeles was built, the Dodger Stadium. Once again Urban Renewal had beautified the city getting rid of the Mexican community that for many years was completely overlooked.

It is true that the economical situation of the

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 107-108.

¹¹McWilliams, op. cit., p. 224.

Mexican-American played a big role in the segregation of housing, but it is by no means the only factor. Although laws specifically against discrimination in housing have been enacted, real estate brokers have continued to deny the Mexican-American, as well as the Negro, the sale of property in certain "restricted" areas of the city.

In 1964, a Spanish-speaking realtor in Los Angeles stated before the California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission On Civil Rights, that it was "difficult to place loans for Spanish-speaking persons who wished to buy homes in certain areas."¹²

When all these factors are taken into account, the ugly fact remains that the Mexican-Americans live in dilapidated homes with substandard municipal services and that mobility out of the barrio, in spite of the laws curbing discrimination in housing, is highly limited.

Employment

One third of the Spanish-speaking people are employed as farm workers in the Southwestern states. They are at the bottom of the economic ladder. "Spanish-speaking," writes Glick, "Work more days for less pay and have a higher rate of unemployment than other farm workers." In 1960, the average income of the Spanish-speaking farm

¹²Glick, op. cit., p. 109.

worker in the Southwest was \$1,256 for 183 days of work. In an area designated as the "Southern Region" by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, mainly Texas, farm workers worked only 115 days and earned an average of \$656."¹³ This is the census of 1960 we are talking about and not the depression years. In my short experience with the migrant ministry in 1963, I could observe the precarious conditions which still prevail in the farm camps among the Spanish-speaking in the San Joaquin Valley. Houses without electricity, heat, running water, or sanitary facilities were not uncommon. On top of all this, farm workers are generally exempt from federal legislation, providing for minimum wages, unemployment, insurance and workman's compensation. It has been only recently that Cesar Chavez, with great difficulties, continuous harrassment, and threats from California growers, has made some gains in these areas.

Similar movements in Texas, as of last year, were brutally crushed by the police and the Rangers. It just does not make any sense that the government would financially subsidize the big grower for not producing while the farmers, who do the job, are being punished with long periods of unemployment, low salaries, poor living conditions; and the government remains silent. This great injustice and

¹³

Ibid., p.109.

oversight can only be explained, when we acknowledge the discriminatory attitudes of high officials and growers, what else?

When the Mexican-American migrates to the city the picture changes very little. Most of them end up in the "sweat shops" of the industrial cities. Careful studies made in federal employment conclude that the Mexican-American is far from being adequately represented in the job scale, according to the general population, and when employed is usually for menial jobs. A survey made in Los Angeles by the Commission on Human Relations showed that, in every job level, Negroes far outnumber the Spanish-speaking even when they are numerically smaller than the Spanish-speaking community.¹⁴

Statistically, in 1960 the Federal Census showed the Mexican-American median income for 1959 as \$5,564, compared with \$6,896 for the whole population of Los Angeles.¹⁵

Education

Up to the present time, education has been a luxury for the Mexican-American, that only a few ever achieve.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁵Almanza, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁶Glick, op. cit., p. 96.

It was only recently that segregated schools were abolished in the United States. Under the excuse of "having a different language" the Mexican-American children were segregated in some places until 1957.¹⁶

As we mentioned earlier, the barrios were placed outside of the Anglo residential sections so that segregation of schools appeared based on location. However, when the district was such that two schools within the community could not be justified, the school officials proceeded to organize a special class for Mexican children arguing that they needed proper attention because of their limited knowledge of English. The civil rights laws and many law suits that followed had brought about the complete desegregation of schools, however, such act has not completely done away with discrimination within the school system and the end-results are not much different.

The educational system has not done justice to the Mexican-American child. Even in a sophisticated school district, such as Los Angeles, the drop-out rate in the predominantly Mexican-American high schools is fifty percent. The average educational level of this minority according to the 1960 census, is less than the ninth grade in Metropolitan Los Angeles.¹⁷ In Texas the figure are more

¹⁶Glick, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁷Almanza, op. cit., p. 5.

tragic, "one fourth of all Mexican-American adults in the state have not completed one school year. Nearly forty percent of all the adults are functional illiterates, that is, people with four years or less of education."¹⁸

In a society where education is highly correlated with income and employment, the Mexican-American with an average of sixth-grade education and the present high drop-out rate, does not have a very promising future.

The people who drew up the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1842, took great pains to insure that the culture and language of the people who remained in the Southwest were properly safe-guarded. Provisions were made for the teaching in Spanish at the grade-school level. However, it was only recently that the Bilingual Education Act was passed, and the schools began to experiment with Spanish as an integral part of the curriculum in the grammar school.

In the recent past, students were punished in public schools when they spoke Spanish. Only last year a group of Mexican-American students staged a walk-out in protest of the restrictions concerning the use of Spanish in the school grounds. This demonstration took place in

¹⁸Jorge Lara-Braud, "The American Dream and the Mexican-American" (Austin: Address presented to the 58th Annual Conference, Texas Social Welfare Association, mimeographed material, 1963), p. 3.

Texas after the Bilingual Education Act was passed. The reasons given for the restrictive rule were that the school wanted the students to practice English so that they could learn it, and that the Anglo students who spoke no Spanish felt offended when they could not understand.

Professor Sanchez has raised very important questions concerning the lack of perception and ignorance of school systems that force the child to forget his language, alienating him from his family who is Spanish-speaking. Once they have achieved this, they place him in Spanish I to learn a foreign language in high school.¹⁹ This type of near-sightedness is being carried out even today in school districts such as Los Angeles where counselors and teachers keep urging students to forget their language.

In a time and age when the mark of an educated person is his ability to speak two or more languages, this practice is difficult to understand, much less condone, especially when it is seen in the light of our growing relations with Latin-American countries because of geographical proximity.

For too long the schools have ignored the potentiality that the Bilingual Education Act is trying to develop.

¹⁹George I. Sanchez, "History, Culture and Education", in Julian Samora (ed.) La Raza: Forgotten Minority (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), p. 18.

There are many studies dealing with the advantages of bilingual education. But, our purpose limits us only to the description of the problem. However, the suppression of Spanish in public schools has bigger and more damaging implications than only the waste of great potentialities to develop a bilingual society. This practice is having a crippling effect in the psychological make-up of the child and on his interpersonal relations with his family and his community.

The question, why does fifty percent of the Mexican-American children drop out before they reach the tenth grade, has been asked by many educators, but only a few have been willing to point the finger where the blame resides. The most common reasons given for this high drop-out rate are: the inability of the youngster to speak English when he comes to the first grade, his lack of "significant" cultural experiences, and the lack of parental interest in education. Of these three reasons, only the first one is partially true. But children pick up the language in the first year, and if the school is doing its job, this situation must be corrected by the second grade. The other two are only excuses created to defend the present system to avoid the necessity of reaching further inside to correct these problems.

When a child comes into a classroom he has had many

meaningful experiences within his own environment. In his home he has been the center of attention, therefore, he sees himself as an important person. But as soon as he arrives to school he is confronted with an Anglo teacher whose language he can't understand, and a curriculum based on a foreign culture whose values he ignores.

The first thing that a child is asked to do is to take an intelligence test so that his school record, which will follow him throughout life, may be started. In an intelligence test, standardized with Anglos of the middle class, he does very poorly. The result is a low score which is placed in his record for future teachers to see even before they meet the child. Anne Anastasi, writing on the subject concludes: "Persons with foreign-language background...experience special difficulties in taking the usual predominantly verbal intelligence test. Although the bilingual individual may have sufficient mastery of English to communicate on ordinary matters and even attend an English-speaking school, he may be handicapped when taking a verbal test in English. Studies on American-born children of foreign parentage, for example, often indicate a special deficiency in verbal tests."²⁰ Many studies

²⁰Anne Anastasi, Psychological Testing (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 235.

have proven beyond doubt that the present verbal tests being administered in the schools do not do proper justice to the minority children,²¹ and yet, hundreds of perfectly normal Mexican-American children are being branded morons year after year. In the past, as well as in the present, the same scores were used to prove that Mexican-American children were inferior.

It has also been proven by some studies that student achievement is heavily influenced by the attitudes that teachers have about their pupils.²² When an Anglo teacher receives a group of Mexican-American children with low I.Q. scores, his expectations of these children are also very low. A child who comes to school and is told to forget his language, to deny his culture, and is treated as inferior begins to develop a poor self-image which eventually takes him to drop out of school before he reaches the tenth grade. In a study made by Dr. Henry Johnson and Phillip Montez at El Rancho School District, very significant conclusions were reached. "We found that the Mexican-American child is just as motivated in kindergarten and first grade as his Anglo counterpart. But in about the

²¹Ibid., p. 236

²²Jonathan Kozol, Death At An Early Age (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 148 f.

third or fourth grade a change begins to take place in the child's motivation patterns. He begins losing educational "ground", so that by the time he reaches the eighth or ninth grade he is anywhere from one to two years educationally retarded. Under this system of "rejection", it is no wonder that he can't succeed educationally."²³

Maria L. Urquidez, after a careful consideration of this problem, concludes that: "Often the first lesson these children learn in school is that everything they have learned before is wrong. Forbidden to use their own language in school, they are expected to learn strange concepts and attitudes through lessons conducted in English, a foreign tongue to them. The result is confusion, failure, and frustration. Perhaps even worse, the educational process makes Mexican-American children ashamed of their own language and cultural heritage. Frequently, when a child enters school, even his name is wrong by Anglo standards, and thus, six-year-old Enrique becomes Henry."²⁴

The inability of the present school system to

²³Phillip Montez, "The Psychology of the Mexican-American Student" (Los Angeles: Foundation for Mexican-American Studies, 1964), p. 2. (mimeographed material).

²⁴Maria L. Urquidez and Others, "Tucson's Tale of Two Cultures", National Education Association Journal, LVI:2 (February 1967), p. 62 f.

develop programs that preserve the self-respect which the child brings to school, and to make proper use of his potentialities through bilingual education, are the two main causes for the high drop-out rate, low achievement, and poor self-image of the Mexican child.

If the Mexican-American citizen is going to take his place along with the Anglo in the life of our nation as equal, the educational system must undergo a radical revision. To ignore this fact is to condemn him to an inferior status, poorly-paid jobs, or the welfare rolls.

Political Representation

In a democracy, politics is the way by which the person participates in his own government. It has been through this channel that many minorities have achieved proper representation, and were accepted and later assimilated into the American way of life. Thus, we find the Irish completing this transition when they managed to imprint their mark in the life of the nation by the celebration of St. Patrick's Day and the election of President Kennedy in 1960. However, the Mexican-American minority has not followed this path. With the exception of New Mexico, where the Mexican-American population constitutes a large percentage of the total population, politics is a completely new fad among the Spanish-speaking people. We

could review the long list of causes why the Mexican-American has not taken seriously his political role, but John R. Martinez does an excellent job in listing them.²⁵ Let us take a look at the two causes which underlie most others. In the first place, the type of politics to which this minority has been submitted in the past has created a feeling of futility and "what-is-the-use?" type of attitude even among the educated elite. Carey McWilliams has pointed out the kind of frustrating struggle to which early Mexican-Americans were confronted in their first encounter with the new government. "When one compares the celerity with which California and Nevada were admitted to the Union, with the prolonged struggle for statehood in New Mexico, it is readily apparent that forces were at work, both within and without the state, to delay admissions until an Anglo majority had been established."²⁶ As a territory, the Anglos controlled the government through appointive power. Thus, New Mexico was ruled from the outside through careful appointments for sixty-three years. This story has repeated itself over and over again

²⁵John R. Martinez, "Leadership and Politics", in Samora, op. cit., p. 47

²⁶McWilliams, op. cit., p. 212.

at the county and city levels. (East Los Angeles has remained, until the present day, as part of the county of Los Angeles, thus, controlled by city hall, but unable to participate in the choice of mayor). Add to this situation the practices of gerry-mandering which takes place in the Mexican-American community, and the election of a Mexican-American becomes almost impossible in most cities. In Los Angeles the Mexican-American community has been divided by districts in such a way that there is no way to elect a Mexican-American candidate without a sizable support of the Anglo community. Two months ago an appeal was made to the city council, by Mexican-American leaders, while they were considering the re-definition of district boundaries, to re-zone the city in a way that would provide the opportunity for the Mexican-American community to elect a councilman. Right after the appeal was made, the whole proposal was dropped.

The other factor which underlies the political passivity of the Mexican-American, is the complete lack of interest which the major parties have shown for this minority. The Democratic Party has taken for granted that this group will vote democratic; and the Republican party is simply not interested in this group. This explains why most of the political organizations which have sprung recently in the Latin community are not affiliated to any

party. This lack of affiliation, has been a help and a further hindrance to such group. By remaining uncommitted, they are able to support all Mexican-American candidates, regardless of party affiliation, but at the same time, they receive no party support because, as Martinez has pointed out, "the parties reward only their own."²⁷ It has only been recently that the Mexican-Americans have developed a new wisdom in politics, and its political consciousness has been awakened by the formation of coalitions. This new day shall be reviewed in later chapters. The effects of World War II and the G.I. Bill made possible the political associations which sprang across the Southwest in the last twenty years. It has been through these organizations that the Mexican-American is beginning to recover his rights. Perhaps the classical example is Crystal City, where the Spanish-speaking population is the over-whelming majority; yet the city council and most key positions in the government were controlled by Anglos. The change came in 1964, when the American Coordinating Council on Political Education was formed and registered the Mexican-American residents. The result was a complete Mexican-American city council. More Crystal cities need to happen to restore the faith of

²⁷Martinez, op. cit., p. 58

the Mexican-American minority in the political system of this nation.

Over a hundred years have passed since the acquisition of the Southwest from Mexico. During these years the Southwest has flourished tremendously; the semi-arid plains have bloomed through irrigation, the industry has developed, and the mild climate has attracted millions of people to these five states; yet the Mexican-American, as a group, has not kept up with the progress. Although he was an important figure in the prosperity of the Southwest, he has remained forty to fifty years behind his coworker, the Anglo. Even though he is the largest minority in the Southwestern United States, he lacks political and economic power. But this powerlessness is not accidental. "It is the direct result of a social system that penalizes difference and rewards conformity."²⁸ It is the outcome of a hundred-years of segregation, discrimination, or plain indifference. But the picture is changing; new and vigorous voices are being heard today and a new generation of Mexican-Americans, impatient, vocal, and militant is now emerging. The hundred-year silence has been broken. The "fiesta" has just begun.

²⁸Lara-Braud, op. cit., p. 3.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW BREED AND A NEW DAY

The Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement

It is difficult to mark the beginning of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement. There is no major event which can be singled-out that served as a launch pad for the increasing movement. Even today, many people react lost when it is mentioned. This ignorance is partly due to the fact that the Mexican-Americans have been ignored consistently by the government. Outside of the Southwest, few people are aware of their existence, much less of their problems. Vicente T. Ximenes was selected by President Johnson to lead a committee on Mexican-American affairs. Two years after his appointment, Mr. Ximenes reports that top officials in Washington still believe that his committee is concerned with the problems of our neighbor country, Mexico.¹ This is why such labels as "The Silent Minority" or the "Forgotten Minority" describe well the type of relationship which this minority has with the Anglo majority. When the Mexican-American is not the object of discrimination, he is met with lack of interest. Nevertheless, the Mexican-American has not been silent all

¹News item in the Los Angeles Times (April 2, 1969)

of this time. As early as 1903, they made the first attempt to unionize farm workers. The same year, over a thousand Mexican and Japanese sugar-beet harvesters went on strike at Ventura, California. In 1927, "La Confederacion De Uniones Obreras Mexicanas" was established, counting a membership of 3,000 workers. The same year, another strike was successfully organized in Imperial Valley. In 1933, two more strikes of Mexican farm workers were registered; one in Los Angeles County and another in San Joaquin Valley.² Three years later, two more strikes followed in Southern California. Although all of these attempts proved abortive, because of the swift intervention of the government with police intimidation, sheer force, and the imprisonment of the leaders, these brave attempts showed the other side of the so-called passive Mexican in the early years of the present century. The Second World War and the recession that followed, coupled with the mass repatriation of Mexicans, irrespective of the place of birth, crushed the growing fight for equal protection under the law. It was during this repatriation that city officials and growers made sure that the leaders were placed over the border, in many cases

²Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961), p. 192

unjustly because many of them had been born in the United States and were rightly registered as American citizens. There are still many persons who, although they can prove that they were born in this country, are denied entrance to the United States and their documents are being confiscated at the border by the immigration officials.

The organization and power displayed by the Black movement encouraged the Mexican-American leadership to unite behind the cause of justice. But it took three to four years after Martin Luther King started his movement, for the Mexican-American groups to achieve national recognition, if not as a movement, at least as a "problem" that needed attention.

New Leadership

Perhaps the best known and most respected leader among the Mexican-Americans today is Cesar Chavez. In 1965 he won national recognition by the successful strike that he led against the grape growers of San Joaquin and Cochella Valleys.

His early childhood was spent following the crops. He attended some thirty schools but ended up with an eighth-grade education. His first-hand experience of all the privations, frustrations, and uncertainties of a migrant life has given him a great empathy and understanding of his people.

His victories have not come easy, but, he has been able to lead his people even in the face of violence and imprisonment. During the most exasperating days of the struggle he underwent a 25-day penitential fast to re-dedicate himself and his followers to the principles of non-violence.

Chavez' dramatic struggle against the powerful growers achieved much success and received a very needed assistance from both the Catholic and Protestant churches who through the migrant ministry had been involved since the beginning. The California grape boycott has attracted international attention and his "organizers" have gone as far as England to enlist the sympathy of the labor unions.

Chavez' struggle has not ended. The conditions of the migrants have not improved much but Chavez has made a good beginning. He has proved to both, migrants and growers, the vast potentialities among the Mexican-Americans for leadership and sacrifice for the cause of justice. Chavez' early victories have shown a new and brighter future.

While Chavez was organizing the migrants, a man by the name of Reies Tijerina was active rallying the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico. Tijerina was born in 1927 near Falls City, Texas, in a share-cropper's shack. He grew up among the migrants of the lower Rio Bravo Valley.

The Tijerina's were not late-comers to Texas. Reies' great-grandfather had a land grant north of Laredo, but when Texas ranchers needed more land, he lost his ranch in the usual way. First he was accused of stealing horses. Later he was taken prisoner and hanged without a trial by the Texas Rangers. His land was sold at a cheap price to the ranchers, and his family became share croppers. Reies' grandfather, who had witnessed the hanging of his father at the age of eight, became a bandit who expressed his bitterness and accomplished his vengeance by raiding the Texas ranchers. As a migrant, he was exposed to the injustices and sufferings that a life without protection under the law has. In his late teens he enrolled in a Bible school of the Assemblies of God at Isleta, Texas, and later assigned to New Mexico as a Pentecostal minister. Here Reies witnessed the same kind of injustices which were common in Texas and began to devise ways to improve the condition of his people. However, his revolutionary spirit was not completely awakened until he clashed with the system he sought to reform. In 1957, together with a group of migrants, he settled and founded a town which they called "Valle de Paz" (Valley of Peace). However, the neighborhood did not want these people to establish themselves permanently, so close to the town, so they engaged in a constant harrassment that included the burning

of Tijerina's home. Reies, his brother and two other residents, were charged with stealing tires from a trailer, a charge later dropped for lack of evidence. But, during the trial Reies was apprehended again and charged with attempting to forcefully free his brother from jail. Completely discouraged by Anglo law and order, Reies left for Mexico and Spain and spent six years doing research regarding the New Mexico land grants.

In 1962 Tijerina was back in New Mexico. More frustrations had been added to these people by the enforcement of new rules by the United States Forest Service. Grassing permits were now enforced and cattle feeding was restricted to small and barren areas. The old custom of common grassing lands disappeared under the new restrictions.

A resident of Tierra Amarilla wrote a letter to the Albuquerque Journal in 1964 saying: "Some of us are pretty desperate. We have tried to be good citizens, and our reward has been no justice in the courts and powdered milk from the Welfare. We don't want Welfare, we want enough of our land to grass a milk cow."³ The time was

³"The Story of Tierra Amarilla, A Chicano Press Special (Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1967), p. 1

ripe for the Alianza Federal de Mercedes and Tijerina wasted no time.⁴ Once the Alianza was organized, he presented a series of demands to the local government who chose to ignore them. But Tijerina was not easily discouraged, he knew that his battle was not going to be easy and he was prepared. He appealed to the Federal Government, but again he was met with indifference. Tijerina claimed that the United States Government had no right to take over the communal Spanish grants that were ceded under pressure from Mexico after the Mexican-American War. He tried to force the federal government to a legal confrontation in court, but the government officials paid no attention to the claims of a group of semi-illiterate peasants. Tijerina changed tactics; he decided to seize one land grant to bring the total picture into focus. On October 15 the Alianza proclaimed the Pueblo Republica de San Joaquin del Rio de Chama and proceeded to take possession of the Forest Service Camp ground, claiming jurisdiction to more than 600,000 acres. This area encompassed the ancient San Joaquin grant issued by the King of Spain in 1806 to the settlers of the Rio Chama Canyon. Again the government chose to ignore Tijerina's action. A few

⁴Antonio Mondragon, "Hope of Mexican-Americans: Reyes Tijerina", La Raza, Barrio Communications Project, I:12 (May 11, 1968), p. 13.

days later, on October of 1967, the Alianza confiscated two government trucks, radio equipment and arrested two U. S. Forest Rangers for trespassing. They were tried, convicted, and later released with a warning not to return.⁵ The reaction of the government was severe. Tijerina was arrested along with some of his followers and charged with assault of federal officials and illegal seizure of government equipment. Tijerina now publically requested a court hearing about the land grants but his request was denied.

During the trial, Tijerina was asked to surrender the list of membership of the Alianza. When he refused he was charged with contempt of court. Meanwhile, the relations between the local government and the members of the Alianza continued to deteriorate, both being afraid of each other.

When the district attorney, Alfonzo Sanchez, tried to arrest the leaders of the Alianza, he ordered the roads to be blocked and declared their meetings unlawful assemblies. "The people's government of San Joaquin came to life again. Its mayor ordered Sanchez arrested and brought to trial. Twenty men were deputized to serve the warrant at the Amarillo's Court House."⁶ The result was a much-

⁵Ibid., p. 12

⁶"The Story of Tierra Amarilla", p. 1

publicized gun duel in the court house, and the kidnapping of a news reporter and a deputy sheriff. Such event was followed by the greatest man hunt in the state of New Mexico, and for many days Tijerina and his men took refuge in the mountains of Northern New Mexico. Finally, Tijerina had succeeded to bring national attention to the plight of the Mexican-American in New Mexico but at a very high price. He was now a wanted man charged with armed assault and kidnapping, a crime punishable by death.

Tijerina was later captured and brought to trial. Acting as his own attorney, Tijerina made headlines because of his rhetorical oratory and excellent defense.

While most newspapers across the nation carried the proceedings of the trial somewhat objectively, the local newspapers created a highly unfavorable environment for Tijerina. But in spite of the smear campaign, Reies was found not guilty, to the joyous surprise of his followers and the bitterness of his enemies. Tijerina's acquittal gave a great boost for his movement in New Mexico. But his original claims concerning the legality of the land grants had lost much appeal. His pleas for a legal confrontation with the federal government never materialized, but even if they had, little could be done to recover the land. The treaty between Mexico and the United States did not recognize the communal land grants. Specifically, Tijerina's

approach helped to bring into focus the injustices to which these people had been subjected when they were robbed of their land. There is now a new awareness of the condition in which these people are forced to live. Even Tijerina's position has shifted from the land grants to the injustices and discriminations of his people. His intended participation in the Poor People's Campaign and his alliance with the militant Blacks has put him and his cause in the mainstream of the civil-rights movement. Tijerina's early moderate approach appealed to many middle-aged people. His new militant stand is attracting the younger generations. Among the latest actions of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes is a law suit filed against the State Board of Education of New Mexico. (This suit is based on the denial of equal educational opportunity to Chicanos on the basis of race, color, national origin, and economic status.)⁷

Almost simultaneously with Tijerina's prominence, a new, but more urbanized, leader appeared in Denver. Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales was a former prize-fighter with a national ranking.⁸ He grew up in the barrios of Denver. He

⁷"Nuevos Mexicanos Claim What is Theirs", La Raza, Barrio Communications Project, I:15 (August 14, 1968)

⁸Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, "The new Mexican-American: another defector from the Gringo world," The New Republic, (July 27, 1968), 11.

observed first-hand the discrimination present in that city against the Mexican-American. His struggle for survival in a hostile environment made him develop certain skills which he later applied to his career as a fighter. Corky made money and invested wisely. In the eyes of many, both Anglo and Mexican-American, he was one of the few Chicanos who had made it. Yet Corky did not forget his barrio and he came back to seek ways for changing the community. His fame as a fighter opened the door among the youth and he began to organize them into a cohesive group.

The Crusade of Justice began attacking the evils of discrimination, urging equal treatment under the law, better housing, and better education. But what distinguished Corky's movement from many others was his emphasis on self-identity and cultural pride. Corky was able to see beyond the call for justice to the necessity of affirming the cultural value of a people whose roots go beyond the Mexican-American War and whose labor built the Southwest. He openly attacked the high requirements which an Anglo society asks from those who want to assimilate. He emphasized nationalism not as a divisive movement, but as a requirement for integration. To integrate as equal one must know himself and his history and be proud of his heritage. Corky and his followers are fighting to preserve the rich-

ness of a culture which is faced with extinction.

In a few years, Corky's Crusade for Justice has achieved wide recognition in the Southwest. His dedication and concern for his people has set the Denver community in march. His militant stand is geared to attract the youth but his appeal has been restricted to the hard-core, highly hostile ghetto dweller. The recent concentration in Denver, housed in the Crusade for Justice headquarters during March 5th and 6th bringing together youths from across the Southwest, only showed the long road ahead for real unity.

Nevertheless, Corky has been able to bring together two elements within himself, considered incompatible by many, a militant stand and a romantic desire to retain and enhance the Mexican-American culture. It is common to hear him add these words after a violent attack of the present system: "We must produce poets, novelists, playwrights, historians and anthropologists to make the Mexican-Americans aware of their culture and background."⁹

A New Generation

Both Corky and Tijerina are not solitary figures in the Southwest. If they have reached national promi-

⁹"Crusade Para La Justicia", La Raza, Barrio Communications Project, I:14 (July 10, 1968), 8.

nence it is because there is a new generation of Mexican-Americans, more sophisticated than their predecessors, who have learned much from their Black brethren. By all counts they are still very small in numbers, but very vocal and militant. They are college and high-school-age students who are growing impatient with the reluctance with which the Anglo society changes. They are disappointed with the silence and accommodation of the self-appointed leaders of the Mexican-American people and they have decided to take the movement in their own hands. The generation before them put the emphasis on political action and many political associations appeared throughout the Southwest. Some of these leaders even got second-rate government posts but the conditions of the larger community did not improve much. The emphasis was to assimilate, to forget their culture and their language. But the Anglo community did not forget the color of their skin. Their taste and features betrayed them and they continued to be Mexican-Americans for the white majority. The new generation learned this lesson well; they rejected the route of self-denial which led no-where, except for those of light skin, and took the road of self-affirmation.

A series of under-ground newspapers, independent from each other, suddenly appeared throughout the Southwest, and the call for social revolution was printed in

their pages. They provided the means for communication among the dissatisfied segment and brought most militant groups together.

New heroes appeared among the Chicanos. Prominent among them was Emiliano Zapata, a popular general of Mexico whose life and thought influenced greatly the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent agrarian reform; Benito Juarez, a full-blooded Indian from Oaxaca who defeated the French army and destroyed the empire of Maximiliano; and Che Guevara, whose revolutionary ideals began to be disseminated among them and whose attire was often emulated.

Small groups of young people began to form, first at the university level, and later in the barrio. The United Mexican-American Students (UMAS) appeared in UCLA and a few months later, chapters spread to other colleges. Other organizations, like the Brown Berets and La Junta, also made their appearance. These were groups made up of militant youngsters who have turned their energies from gang activity to the fight for social justice.

Lucha (The League of United Citizens to Help Addicts, that in Spanish spells FIGHT) is an organization of narcotic addicts and interested persons whose primary motive rests in the fact that they are a self-help group with the desire to help the community to eradicate social

injustices.¹⁰

The Brown Berets have adapted the motto, "to observe, to serve, and to protect". They have made it clear that their services are available to community groups and that they are ready to do what the community wants them to do. They have appeared at every demonstration where Mexican-American rights are in question. Their popularity reached its peak during the month of March in 1968, when several Eastside high schools staged massive walk-outs to protest the conditions in their sub-standard schools. Since these schools are predominantly Mexican-American and the Brown Berets appeared early in the picture, they were singled-out by the police and the news media as the "Master Minds" behind the school boycott. Also blamed for the walk-outs, although their participation was only supportive, were the different UMAS chapters.

The answer of the city government to the walk-outs and the demonstrations for better schools that followed was received in the usual manner, and within a few weeks the district attorney had handed out thirteen indictments of young leaders of the New Movement.

The general reaction which followed the indictments

¹⁰News item in La Raza: Barrio Communications Project, I:14 (July 10, 1968), 9.

caught by surprise the city officials who were accustomed to deal with a silent minority. The ridiculous bail of \$10,000 was reduced to almost nothing. But their case is still pending in the courts.

A New Day

What marks the beginning of a new day for the Mexican-American minority is the new social awareness of its youth. In the past, the Spanish-speaking community lost its educated leadership to the suburbia. The ghetto experienced a constant drain of its potential leaders who had the training and knowledge to guide them in their battle for improvement. The new generation is returning to the barrio to help organize the community. These college students that, for the most part, come from middle-class homes with a reactionary background have taken places of leadership among the grass roots groups. Their militant stand has not only rallied the youth, but also forced the moderates to take a different approach.

In March 1966, during a regional conference sponsored by the Federal Government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Albuquerque, New Mexico, forty Mexican-American leaders staged a walk-out claiming lack of interest in Mexican-American problems by such a conference. These walk-outs were the expression of a new militancy and

defiant approach by these leaders that a few years ago were moderates or even conservatives. Their attitude has been called the beginning of the Mexican Revolt by the reporter of the Washington Post.¹¹

As early as 1965, the Mexican-American leaders asked the President for a White House Conference on Civil Rights but they were ignored. Two years later, President Johnson called a Mexican-American Civil Rights Conference in El Paso, attended by Vice President Humphrey, but boycotted by many of the Mexican-American leaders who, instead, marched outside with picket signs.

On October 1967, a Conference of La Raza Unida was called, to which most middle-class leaders of the Mexican-American communities participated.¹² The membership, being mostly middle-aged and moderate, clashed with the younger group present who pushed for a more nationalistic stand. Such proposals were overwhelmingly silenced and the younger people left the conference denying any association with the moderates. However, the position papers presented to such conferences and the resolutions passed were just as militant. The follow-up conference, held at San Antonio,

¹¹Rowland Evans and Robert Novak "Inside Report.... The Mexican Revolt", The Washington Post (March 31, 1966), A-3

¹²News item, La Raza: Barrio Communications Project, I:5 (November 15, 1967), 5.

was forced to take an even stronger stand by the criticism of the young militants who called themselves "La Raza Nueva" to differentiate themselves from "La Raza Unida", which they perceived as reactionary.

During the January Conference of La Raza Unida in 1968, the following statements were made: "We....denounce, without any reservations, any case of police brutality, especially against our people, and particularly against our young,..We demand the abolition of the Texas Ranger... The worst exploitation that the Gringo perpetuates on us is through some member of our ethnic group. For the love La Raza, it is absolutely necessary to denounce, by whatever means possible, any Mexican-American who betrays us, especially those who pass as our leaders and representatives."¹³

During the month of March, four Eastside schools staged a walk-out in protest of the school's conditions. Their demands included open restrooms, open campus policy, the removal of the plain-clothes policemen from campus, better food in the cafeteria, the removal of corporal punishment, sensitive bilingual teachers, and bicultural education. These last two petitions caused an upset

¹³ La Raza Unida, (findings from the discussion groups, San Antonio, Texas, Mexican-American Unity Conference, 1968), p. 4.

among the Anglo teachers who felt threatened by what they termed racist demands. When the walk-outs happened, the principals overreacted and the riot police were brought onto the campus. What started as a peaceful demonstration soon escalated into a disturbance when the police appeared. In the heat of the student demonstrations, a coalition of organizations who intended to mediate between the students and the school administrators was born. The atmosphere of distrust and the negative attitude of school officials made any mediation difficult. After a careful evaluation of the educational program in Los Angeles, which is producing a fifty percent drop-out rate among the Mexican-American, it was decided that the goal of the new organization was to improve the educational system of Los Angeles by whatever non-violent means were available. During the year of 1968, the city of Los Angeles saw the emergence of a powerful organization called the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee. Their verbal attacks on the Board of Education was followed by mass demonstrations and picket lines which have brought significant victories. In spite of the decided opposition of the powerful block of administrators, they forced the Board of Education to reinstate a teacher who had been a leader in the walk-outs. After mass demonstrations the Board suspended the Intelligence Test administered in the grammar schools of the

Eastside. Recently they have accepted the formation of a Citizen's Review Board to help the Board of Education with policy programs dealing with the schools of East Los Angeles.

"The Brown Power Mexican is telling the Anglo that things have changed. The Mexican rural laborer faced away a generation ago. His son moved to the city. He's young, tough, smart, and he's 'watching you, white man'. He's not patient; he's not submissive. He's not Tio Taco who wants to please his Anglo patron."¹⁴

¹⁴Ralph Guzman, "Brown Power: The Gentle Revolutionaries", Los Angeles Times West Magazine, (January 26, 1969), 9.

CHAPTER V

THE PROTESTANT CHURCH AMONG THE MEXICAN-AMERICANS

The history of the Protestant Church among the Mexican-Americans has not yet been written. Fragmented accounts can be found in journals, magazines, and newspapers, but no systematic follow-up has been made. Even today, the available statistics concerning church membership among Spanish-speaking churches are confusing and incomplete.

The missionary activity among Spanish-speaking people dates back to the early Anglo colonization of the Southwest. The Presbyterians had an early pioneer in 1838 who began her missionary work in Texas. Her memoirs also confirm the presence of Methodist missionaries in this area as early as 1850.¹ But if the missionary activity began at that early date not much interest was displayed by the different denominations in the years that followed. The present work has been the by-product of dedicated persons and not the general interest of the denominations.²

Why this lack of concern for the Mexican-American?

¹Joan Moore, "The Protestant Church and the Mexican-Americans" (mimeographed, 1967), p. 9.

²Kyle Haseldon, Death of a Myth (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 10.

First, there is today as before the general accepted assumption that Protestantism and Spanish culture are alien to each other, that they are totally incompatible and mutually exclusive.³ Under this assumption the church felt excused of her missionary work; after all to change the religion of the Mexican-American was virtually impossible. This assumption was born by the general acceptance of the stereo-type of the Mexican, rather than after a careful analysis of his culture. Mexicans are supposed to be highly emotional, given to fiestas, touchy and quarrelsome by nature. Thus, they need a religion which allows certain laxity and uses color in its rituals. Protestantism with a puritanical background cannot fulfill the needs of the Mexican-American.

In the second place there was a general unwillingness of early Anglo pioneers to mix socially with the Mexicans. To start a mission among Spanish-speaking would force the membership to socialize with them. Thus, even during the peak of the great missionary century, the Mexican-American went almost unnoticed. Africa, Asia, and Latin America were saturated with missionaries but the Southwest was conveniently forgotten.

The early missionaries of the Southwest, when

³Ibid., p. 89

campaigning for funds to support their missionary activities, did not explore with the churches the need of reaching these people with a Christian message, but the fact that conversion made "worthy citizens" out of typical Mexicans.⁴ Their techniques only show the contempt for anything Mexican in those early days.

Vernon McCombs, as late as 1925, speaks of the Mexican-American in a very condescending and paternalistic manner, "much of the vice of the Mexican people is really unmorality."⁵

In spite of the indifference of the major denominations and the discriminatory practices of their laity, the the Protestant Church has established itself very securely among Mexican-Americans.

As we review the history of these churches, we can readily find three different stages of development: 1) Early missionary activity by Anglo missionaries, 2) the organization of separated bodies, synods or conferences for the Spanish-speaking and, 3) the move towards integration.

Because of the limitation of our sources we will

⁴Moore, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵Vernon McCombs, From Over The Border (New York: Friendship Press, 1925), p. 30.

only consider three major denominations, the Methodist, the Baptist, and the Presbyterian. Since these are the ones who have the largest Spanish-speaking membership, we may safely infer that the other denominations who have worked among the Mexican-Americans share a similar history.

Early Missionary Activity

As we have mentioned above, missionary beginnings can be traced as far back as 1838 in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, in Texas. By 1850, Melinda Rankin, a Presbyterian missionary, according to some,⁶ and a Baptist, according to others,⁷ writes about the work of the Methodist missionaries in Texas. This early work was sporadic in nature and did not produce any significant congregation until after the Civil War.

In 1850, the first Presbyterian missionary entered New Mexico, to be followed later by Reverend John Annin who is considered the Father of Mexican work in New Mexico. The first Methodist who worked and developed the missionary field in New Mexico was a Roman Catholic priest, who, because of his efforts to organize the Mexicans against the injustices of the rich class, he was harrassed

⁶Moore, op. cit., p. 9

⁷McCombs, op. cit., p. 161.

and dismissed by his bishop. Finding no support in Rome he went to England, where he found protestant friends who later introduced him to the Methodist Church. Father Benigno Cardenas returned to New Mexico under the sponsorship of the New York Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, and for many years "he was alone in the territory....and the records show that, his was the only productive protestant ministry in the territory, and that he really laid the foundations of a living evangelical church among his people."⁸

As early as 1874, the Southern Methodist Church established a mission district and most evangelistic materials began to appear in Spanish.

Only a few and sporadic missionaries were seen in Texas before the Civil War, but by 1880 a new successful endeavor was made by Anglos who had been missionaries in Mexico.⁹

The missionary work in California among Latin-Americans began rather late. Both the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches claim missionary activity among Mexicans as far back as 1879, but only a few were reached. Their strategy was to draw them into the Anglo Churches. The

⁸Moore, op. cit., p. 16.

⁹Ibid., p. 13.

formal work among Mexican-Americans by the Methodist Church began in 1911, when the Reverend Vernon McCombs was appointed as the Superintendent of the Spanish and Portuguese Mission District.¹⁰

In California, the Baptist also came rather late into the picture. Although some missionary activity has been recorded earlier, the first chapel built by the Baptists to serve Mexicans in Los Angeles was in 1910, and the first organized church was the Santa Barbara First Mexican Baptist under the leadership of Reverend Benjamin Urquidi in 1921.¹¹ In 1911 the Reverends Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Troyer, who labored in Puerto Rico, were appointed by the Southern California Convention and the American Baptist Home Mission Society to serve as General Missionaries to the Spanish-Speaking people. It was during their leadership that the early foundations were laid for the largest Protestant denomination among Mexican-Americans.

In 1908, the Texas Mexican-Presbytery was founded.¹² With the appointment of Vernon McCombs and the creation of the Spanish Mission District, a segregated body in the

¹⁰Horacio Quinones, "A Short History of the Baptist Church among Spanish-Speaking People" (Los Angeles, 1966, mimeographed).

¹¹Ibid., p. 17.

¹²Moore, op. cit., p. 11.

Methodist Church emerged. The same later became the Provisional Latin-American Conference. Although no Spanish-speaking church was financially independent, La Convencion Bautista Mexicana was organized in 1923.

Segregated Bodies

The emergence of segregated bodies, some which exist even today,¹³ marks the beginning of a different era in the work among the Mexican-Americans. As a segregated body the Spanish-speaking churches experienced more freedom and established new and more appropriate rules for their functioning. It was during this phase that the work among Spanish-speaking people experienced its major numerical growth. There was also a marked sense of "pride which was manifested, and new hopes, new aims, and new vision."¹⁴

As a semi-independent body the church was able to develop a large quantity of indigenous leaders of natural aptitude, although they lacked formal education, and a sense of dedication to the work of the protestant church.

In the 1950's the trend toward segregation was reversed and a movement towards integration appeared among

¹³The Rio Grande Conference of the Methodist Church in Texas.

¹⁴Quinones, op. cit., p. 22.

the denominations. There was an increasing criticism, both from within and without the denominations, for the existence of segregated bodies. Furthermore, the government was moving to integrate the school system, and the Church was under fire by the liberals for its segregation-al practices. The emergence of a new militancy among the Black people caused the Anglo conference to move toward integration at an accelerated rate. Integration began where it was easier. A small number of Spanish-speaking churches with a rather insignificant membership composed of "almost white people", presented less of a threat to the large Anglo membership. Furthermore, the denominations saw the opportunity to ameliorate the financial burden which the small Spanish-speaking churches were causing to the denominations. The multiplicity of small churches required the financial support of the Board of Missions over long periods of time.

The liberal element in the denominations saw the ethnic church only as a step in the acculturation process of the individual, thus, having a temporary function. Since the "melting pot" theory of acculturation was prevalent in the sociological field, the ethnic church was seen as necessary to work with the recent immigrant of Mexico, but there was the complete certainty that the second generation would attend the Anglo churches. That the

Spanish-speaking churches had survived so long was incomprehensible to these people. Others saw the ethnic church as an obstacle to assimilation, thus, integration of separated bodies was seen as the solution to many problems.

It is obvious that integration on this basis did not come easy, nor has it produced the expected results. Among denominational officials there is a general dismay that "integration" has not worked. The second, or third generation of Mexican-Americans are not transferring in mass to the Anglo churches. On the other side, the Spanish-speaking ministers fell into a demoralizing state when they lost control over their work and saw the closing of many of their churches. More than ten years have passed after integration and the Latin churches have experienced a decrease in their membership without a substantial increase of Spanish-surnamed persons in the Anglo churches, and a critical shortage of leaders.

What went wrong? Many Latin ministers claim that integration was unfair to them. They were not given equal status when received into the large conference. Others affirm that their increase in salary was about the only good thing that came from integration. Still others would say that they were not ready for integration, that the haste with which the Anglo conferences and the Board of Missions proceeded have damaged the work among the Span-

ish-speaking population.

When one surveys the problem of integration objectively one easily finds some factors which went unnoticed when the merger took place.

Some of the early missionaries had a great vision of ministering to the Spanish-Americans but had no intentions of creating a separated body. They urged the Anglo churches to reach into the barrios and to bring these people into their own churches. The discriminatory attitudes and practices among the Anglo membership soon discouraged this method of outreach. The different language provided a reason for the creation of a separated church and later a separated body. Once the different bodies appeared the necessity of procuring Mexican ministers to serve these small churches was undertaken, but little or no provision was made for their theological training.

In the second place, the denominations were not ready to invest in something that was not showing results in terms of membership. The vast missionary camp beyond the borders was far more exciting and attractive and conveniently removed, therefore, the resources were channeled outside of the country. Although most denominations formed a Home Missions Board, it was always outshined by the activities and resources of the Foreign Missions Boards.

From the very beginning the Spanish-speaking segregated body, began under ill-prepared leadership, limited

financial resources, and little interest from their Anglo counter-parts. Even during the great era of the social gospel the ethnic churches and settlement houses appeared under the leadership of Anglos, to give, to provide, to serve the Mexican-Americans but seldom to find ways of self-help among them. It is only recently that community centers and settlement houses serving this minority for many years are changing their leadership from Anglo to Spanish-speaking.¹⁵ But even here the change has been resisted by many Anglo liberals charging that there is no qualified leadership among minority members. Some of these centers have been in operation for thirty or more years and they have not produced a qualified person to assist or be employed in their multiple staff. This only affirms the paternalistic approach that such service centers have followed.

The creation of a separated body without proper attention to its leadership created in effect two different and unequal kinds of churches within one denomination.

Anglo missionaries, appointed heads of segregated

¹⁵Plaza Community Center elected a Mexican-American to the position of Executive Director in 1964. Toberman House made an unsuccessful attempt in 1968. All Nations Foundation which also serves the Spanish-speaking has made provisions to prepare Mexican-American personnel but at the present time has no Mexican-American in its executive staff. Furthermore, the Board of Directors of all of these are mainly Anglos.

bodies, urged their Mexican-American pastors to forget about proper preparation. The accepted belief was that to minister to a minority with lower educational level you did not need trained leadership.

We know of specific instances when these missionaries obstructed the further academic preparation of Latin ministers who were willing to continue their education.¹⁶

"A survey of 300 delegates attending three Mexican Baptist Conventions in the late 1940's showed only twenty-five percent who received high school, college, or seminary training, and thirty percent who received no education at all."¹⁷ Even today the requirements in some integrated bodies, for Latin prospects entering the ministry are lower than those of their Anglo counter-parts. Such early practices pre-supposed that the Mexican-American minority was not going to achieve a higher level of education, thus, trained leadership was not necessary. The early separation of these two bodies plus the lack of seminary training of the indigenous leadership also created a difference in theological perspective.

¹⁶Personal interview with Rev. Juan Medellin.

¹⁷Moore, op. cit., p. 23.

Theological Perspective

The early missionaries who began to reach toward the Mexican-American were fundamental in their theology, puritanic and ascetic in their social life and anti-Catholic in their politics. This was the theology under which the Spanish-speaking Protestant Church was born. A century has passed since its beginning and the Mexican church has moved little, if any from this position. The lack of interest in theological training of the early missionaries was inherited and preserved by the indigenous leadership.

The emphasis became the individual's salvation from sin. The sacred and secular realms were seen as completely separated and exclusive from each other. Faith was the central concept of the religious life. The Bible must be literally accepted because it is the word of God.

The upsurge of the liberal theology of the 19th century and later the "Social Gospel" movement had great impact in the Home Missions Department of the major denominations, specifically the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Yet the "other world" orientation of Latin churches failed to provide the necessary receptivity for the "Social Gospel" movement. The Mexican-American churches accepted the social centers only as another one of the imposed programs from the denominations which would provide the incentive to bring people into the church.

Since the indigenous leadership had no part in their foundation or direction, little impact was made in the Latin churches.

The optimistic view of man and the faith in the process of evolution also changed the view of sin as something institutionally transmitted, therefore, social institutions, rather than the individual, became the objects of salvation. Once the social order was changed, the individual would be changed. Man was seen as essentially good. Thus, the need of changing his environment that imprisoned him was of utmost importance. Under this point of view, the community centers and settlement houses were born. In this respect it is important to note that the Presbyterians U.S.A. established thirty such centers by 1960, while their membership among Spanish-speaking was only 6,604. On the other hand, the Southern Baptists with a membership of 28,000 only established three centers. This fact reflects the theological perspective of the different Boards.¹⁸

The community centers became a valuable tool during the depression and many Spanish-speaking churches were organized around, or in connection with, the center that gave away food and clothing.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 5.

The pietistic emphasis among the Mexican-American churches brought the community centers into conflict with the Spanish-speaking clergy. The remarks of one such pastor characterized the thinking of many: "Social centers bring in the wrong kind of people, those who are not spiritually orientated, but who only come for the service that is provided. Furthermore, the activities carried on at the center may corrupt the 'truly religious'."¹⁹

Today's Picture

Although there are at the present time separated and semi-independent Spanish-speaking bodies within some denominations, the present picture is one of integration. Even within the existing segregated bodies, attempts are presently being made towards integration. The national scene is such that complete segregation is no longer a feasible possibility, either socially or financially. But true integration is a difficult thing. Both Anglo and Spanish-speaking churches are not ready for a fraternal relationship among equals. For many Anglos integration still means the merger and disappearance of the Latin-American bodies into the larger denomination. On the other hand, the Latin groups are not willing to relinquish their

¹⁹Quoted by Rev. David Orosco.

identity. Furthermore, as we mentioned before, past practices have created two churches, one serving the middle class with seminary-trained leadership, and the other serving the lower class, with an ill-prepared clergy. What complicates the picture even more is the persistence of the Spanish language among the Mexican-American minority.

In the Presbyterian Church the Spanish-speaking work has been placed under the supervision of the Inner-City Department, thus, giving them more freedom of action.²⁰ The social centers are moving into the area of community organization. This method was first applied to the migrant laborers by the migrant ministry. But its appearance in the social centers has antagonized the Spanish-speaking congregation and their leadership.

The present Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement presents a remarkable opportunity for the Spanish-speaking churches to make their witness, but the churches serving them are not equipped to do so. They are still oriented towards the "other world". They still condemn any social movements as communist, subversive, or at least pagan. The lack of trained leadership among the clergy has produced a poorly-prepared laity unable to develop a

²⁰Moore, op. cit., p. 37.

significant ministry in today's world.

With the exception of a few new buildings, Latin congregations still continue to meet in the old structures which they inherited when an Anglo congregation died because of the turn-over in community population from Anglo to Spanish-speaking. This system of hand-outs as a result of community shifts in population only produced a multiplicity of small congregations with inadequate buildings. The traditionally Catholic-oriented Mexican-American population could not fill in all the Church vacancies which were being left by the Anglo evacuation.

Most denominations have started with limited resources in their attempt to reach the Mexican-Americans and have kept the work going under limited conditions, the results are a multiplicity of ill-equipped churches that have cost them more than if there had been a careful strategy backed by a decided financial commitment since its early beginnings.

In the preparation of ministerial leadership, the American Baptists were the only large denomination to provide for the establishment of a seminary. Although unaccredited, this seminary performed valuable functions for the Spanish-speaking work. It is of significance to note that since it was closed in 1960, the Baptists have experienced a shortage of Latin ministers. The closure of

the seminary was but one of the many moves toward integration. Now all candidates from Latin churches must meet all academic requirements and pass through accredited theological schools. Such a move, although good in intention, only reflects the lack of awareness with which the move towards integration and quality was made. When there exists a high percentage of drop-outs in high school among this minority, to require four years of college and three or four of seminary from a candidate to the ministry, results in an impossible task. To bring a radical change into a system which practiced a double standard to correct the inequality and discrimination without allowance for compensatory work in the part of the minority creates more problems than those it seeks to solve. Furthermore, to ask for quality of training without equal opportunity tends to discourage rather than attract possible prospects. Even though most denominations have established an open pulpit policy in theory, the actual practice has not shown its implementation.

Although integration is the present trend, little effort is going into the study of its effects and implications. The prevalent philosophy among the denominations' officials is still the "melting pot" theory of assimilation. History shows that such theory has not worked in the past with respect to the Mexican and there is no

reason to expect its success in the present. Nevertheless, it is an easy approach which does not require the adjusting and learning which a pluralistic approach to integration requires. But as long as we keep ignoring the lessons of history we shall fail in our attempts to create an integrated church. According to recent statistics²¹ only five percent, at the most, can be considered protestant from the entire Spanish-speaking population. (The fragmentary statistics defy a correct calculation of Spanish-speaking membership and five percent is a liberal percentage to account for the enrollment of the Pentecostal Church.)

After reviewing the present history of the Spanish-speaking work, Haseldon concludes: No denomination has made a decided effort to reach this minority. "The figures suggest that denominational officials know the problem and sense its challenge but are preoccupied by interests that are assumed to be more important. In a word, the figures leave us with the unmistakable conclusion that most protestant churches are not taking the Spanish-American challenge seriously."²²

²¹Haseldon, op. cit., p. 104.

²²Ibid., p. 103.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROLE OF THE SPANISH-SPEAKING CHURCH IN THE LIGHT OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN MOVEMENT

In the preceeding chapter we discussed the work and social outlook of the present Spanish-Speaking Churches. To avoid repetition we shall address ourselves in this chapter to the present social concern and future of the church in the light of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement.

A Realistic View

Numerically, the Protestant Church, among the Mexicans, has been estimated to comprise five percent of the Spanish population in the Southwest.¹ This figure, as we mentioned above, is a very liberal estimate. But even accepting such figure as correct, five percent is numerically insignificant to have any decisive influence on the other ninety-five. Furthermore, the conservative theological orientation has taken the vast majority to a reactionary position. Thus, the Latin church as a whole has remained aloof from the social problems which the minority it serves is facing. This raises important questions:

¹Kyle Haseldon, Death of a Myth (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 102.

Why is it that a church that preaches love and justice has remained blind to the social injustices? Why has the Spanish-Speaking Church, that lives in the community and is part of the oppressed minority, so largely ignored the needs and sufferings of these people? We cannot deny that the Protestant people are a part of the oppressed minority, for they live and experience the same problems that all the other members of the minority are experiencing: hunger, sickness, discrimination, and death.

To answer those questions we must go back to the missionary period. We have previously discussed the techniques used by the early missionaries to convert the people. We have also pointed out the theology that they implanted and the rigidity with which it has been kept by the indigenous leadership. We have also discussed the poor follow up of the denominations. The end product of such history is one of conservatism both in theory and in practice.

The negative perception of the world as "sinful" has kept the church from reaching out in the fear that the faithful may be contaminated. Since its beginnings the Latin Church understood herself as a separated entity, a retreating place, whose mission was to segregate the Christians from the world. Thus, we find today a church that has no place in society, has lost contact with the

community, and is unconcerned with what takes place outside of her walls.

The second reason for this lack of concern, and perhaps the most difficult to overcome, is the existing identification of the present structure of the Church with her message. This identification has led the members to believe that the structure must be preserved as received. Christian Lalive d'Epinay reviews this problem in Latin-America and concludes: "The Protestant people have an oppressed conscience, but even worse than that is the fact that they live within an organization that reinforces the oppression by providing a cultural and social structure that sanctifies this state of oppression...The Denominations make their members believe that such structures have God's approval, therefore, they are beyond question or change."²

The Spanish-Speaking Church And the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement

Although the Protestant Church among the Mexican-American minority is numerically small and officially unconcerned with the Civil Rights Movement, ideologically,

²Christian Lalive d'Epinay, "La Iglesia Evangelica y la Revolucion Latinnoamericana", Cristianismo y Sociedad VI:16-17, p. 24. (Translation mine).

it has given direction and provided some leadership in its early stage. Furthermore, the fact the the Negro Movement was very much influenced by the protestant churches has made an impact in the Chicano Movement as well. The present commitment of the different church agencies to social change through community organization has greatly influenced the movement and provided the means for its development.

Reies Tijerina, the militant leader of New Mexico, was at one time a Pentecostal minister, but was forced to leave the church because of his radical views concerning social justice. Nevertheless, he has over and over stressed that his involvement in the movement is a consequence of his ministry and his commitment to the Gospel. So much has he identified one with the other that his so-called "radical speeches" are often saturated with biblical references and they are delivered with the same evangelical fervor. Perhaps Tijerina would have remained within the church if his denomination or his congregation had supported him in the same way that Martin Luther King received such support from his church, but such social concern was lacking.

The leader of Denver, Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales, does not claim any church affiliation. To claim protestant background or association with a reactionary church in a

minority that traditionally has been considered Catholic or non-church oriented, would hinder his work among them. Nevertheless, in the last Council on Spanish-American Work Convention, celebrated in Denver during the month of January of 1968, he acknowledged publicly the influence that a concerned church and a Presbyterian minister had in his early childhood.

The situation in Los Angeles is not very different, among the young militant leaders. Eliezer Risco, who at one time was a Baptist minister, now is the editor of the newspaper, La Raza, an influential underground newspaper that has been credited as the rallying point for the young militants in Los Angeles. Working with La Raza Nueva, we find Ruth Robinson, another dedicated leader who, up to five years ago, had the intentions of becoming a full-time missionary of the Presbyterian Church. In both of these cases, the lack of sensitivity of the established church for the plight of the Mexican-American was a decisive factor that made them leave the church and work directly with the community.³ Along with them are many other young leaders that have had direct connection within a congregation, or indirectly through a community center.

³Personal interview with Mr. Eliezer Risco and Miss Ruth Robinson

Among the community leaders who are actively engaged in the movement, providing the leadership and tapping the resources that have brought about social change. we find Antonio Hernandez, an ordained Presbyterian minister, now president of the Congress of Mexican-American Unity. This is a grass roots organization actively engaged in developing the political power of East Los Angeles. He is presently employed under a Ford Foundation grant for community development. Vahac Marderrosian, a Mexican-born Baptist minister, is president of the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee, a powerful organization committed to the betterment of the educational system of East Los Angeles, whose work and achievements were already discussed in the preceeding chapter. Horacio Quinones, an ordained Baptist minister, is now employed by the Strategy Committee of the Council on Hispanic-American Ministries, as community organizer. Antonio Medina, a Presbyterian minister, is actively involved in community organization.

In April of 1968, John Dart of the Los Angeles Times wrote: "Protestant clergymen are in the forefront of the fight for changes in Los Angeles Public Schools for Mexican-Americans, whose traditional roots lie in Roman Catholicism."⁴

⁴John Dart, "Protestant Clergy Leads Fight for Mexican-American Goals", The Los Angeles Times (April 5, 1968).

The same picture that we find in Los Angeles is also beginning to appear in other cities across the Southwest. Ministers and laymen are working with the people; they have organized marches, picket lines; they have been the spokesmen for the poor.

Reformation: A Pressing Need

As we mentioned before, the present movement has both, challenged the church, and presented an opportunity to develop a ministry of service to the community, by helping its residents in the fight against injustices and discrimination. But before the Spanish-speaking Church can find her place in the Mexican-American Movement, she needs to enter into a state of renewal. Many writers have discussed this subject and most of them have agreed that if the church is going to be relevant to the community, she serves, and to the moment in which she lives, she must be in constant renewal. Old forms need to be constantly reviewed and new forms developed to meet the changing needs of the society. Robert Raines opened his book, Reshaping the Christian Life, with a call to a complete change in church structure. "We can see now that the church needs more than inner renewal within traditional patterns. The wine of new life makes new wineskins necessary. Nothing less than transformation and reshaping will enable the church to be reborn into the kind of being and doing that

will be adequate for God's purpose in our day."⁵ Visser't Hooft has written a complete treatise on the biblical and theological elements in church renewal.⁶ Elsewhere we can find feeble but decided efforts to achieve a renewal and yet this spirit of reformation has not reached the Spanish-Speaking Churches. But if the Latin Church is going to serve a people caught in the struggle for change and reformation of social structures, she must take seriously the words of the prophets of renewal. This is what the Catholic Church in Latin America has found. Caught in rapid social change and challenged by the popular movements, to take a stand against the injustices and the oppression of monolithic structures, she is undergoing a transformation. During the second conference of the Council of Bishops that took place in Colombia, those gathered heard over and over again the call to renewal. Monsenor Marcos McGrath, Bishop of Santiago de Veraguas, Panama, affirmed: "The Church must be in constant renewal to be able to contribute to the transformation taking place in Latin America, so that it may be positive, human, and Christian."⁷

The Bishop of Cuernavaca, Monsenor Sergio Mendez-

⁵Robert A. Raines, Reshaping the Christian Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 2.

⁶W. A. Visser't Hooft, La Renovacio de la Iglesia (Buenos Aires: Editorial "La Aurora", 1952).

Araceo also called the church to a radical transformation as the essential prerequisite if the church must carry on its mission in a revolutionary situation. "It is only from an experience of change that the church will be able to rise to the heights that our revolutionary times demand."⁸

The renewal, of the Latin Church, must take place at two different levels. First, there needs to be a radical change in theological orientation; second, there must be a complete transformation in the present church structure. Only a change of such magnitude would free her to find her mission in the light of the present movement.

Theological Renewal As long as the Latin Church persists in preaching an other-worldly Christianity, no real attempt will be made by her constituents to be involved in the life of the community. As long as the sole concern of the church would be to "save" the individual by separating him from his community and place him within the structure of the church, she will not be able to

⁷ Monsenor Marcos McGrath, "Los Signos de los Tiempos en America Latina Hoy", La Iglesia en la Actual Transformacion de la America Latin a la Luz del Concilio (Bogota: CELAM, 1969), p. 84.

⁸ Monsenor Sergio Mendez-Arceo quoted in Fichas de ISAL Publicacion de Iglesia y Sociedad en America Latina, Montevideo, Uruguay, I:7 (Enero 1969), 12. (mimeographed).

provide any kind of leadership to the movement. The present preaching only helps people to accommodate themselves to the system with all its social evils.

The theology of the Spanish-speaking Church is the legacy of a time when the function of the ethnic church was to help her members to accommodate themselves to the system rather than to improve their lot or to oppose the injustices to which they were being subjected. For the Black churches to become the centers of protest against the segregation and discrimination a radical change was necessary. Joseph Hough, Jr. has summarized it very well: "Prior to the Negro Revolt of the 1950's, the hope that was preached in the Negro Church was of a distinctly other-worldly character...The Negro Church offered a religion for oppressed people who saw no deliverance from their oppressors, and whose strength to continue to exist in the world of segregation and discrimination, was renewed by a hope for a better time some day in heaven. This is no longer the gospel of many Negro churches, for the message preached in many of them today is distinctly "this-worldly":⁹

The church needs to recapture the concept of God as

⁹Joseph C. Hough, Jr., Black Power and White Protestants (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 73.

the creator of the world, and the creation as the stage of his activity. Or as Robert Raines puts it. God is a God who brings down and raises up, a God who destroys and builds again. He is a judging God whose judgment is not punitive but redemptive. He is a God who is always doing a new thing, who is ever shaping and reshaping His people."¹⁰ She needs to rediscover that the history of the church is one of constant reformation, or in the words of Visser't Hooft: "a story of many resurrections".¹¹

Along with a new concept of God and creation we need a new anthropology. If man is seen as a duality of body and soul, flesh and spirit, and the mission of the church as concerned with the spiritual realm, then man's social needs will be completely ignored. As long as the church persists in viewing man as a sinful creature it will not be interested in those things that belong to the sphere of man and society. If the Church continues to place a main emphasis on the subjective experience of salvation, she will continue the kind of traditional pietism that is blinding her to the totality and complexity of human experience. "Traditional piety becomes a means of subverting the gospel and its responsibilities, turning

¹⁰Raines, op. cit., p. 6.

¹¹Visser't Hooft, op. cit., p. 65.

men and women away from their calling to mission and justifying their neglect to the imperatives of love and a new situation."¹²

Structural Transformation The old structures inherited from their missionaries have little to offer that will serve the Church in its present changing situation. The present paternalistic relationship with the denominations is an obstacle for an effective service to the community. How can a Church, living in an oppressive condition, provide some kind of leadership to a minority which is struggling to free itself from such state of oppression? Only a radical transformation of the present structure will free the Latin congregations to be "the Church" in the Mexican-American community.

This calls for a new self understanding on the part of the Spanish-speaking Church. She needs the appropriate words of Monsenor Sergio Mendez-Arceo: "Outside of God there is nothing sacred, not even the Church. Instead, we may affirm that beginning with the Gospel; God is engaged in a desacralization action, and that Christian holiness is, precisely, in taking care of not giving sacred status to the human realities."¹³

¹²Gibson Winter, The New Creation as Metropolis (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 25.

This transformation should begin with the establishment of a new relationship with the denomination. The Latin Church must be part of all decisions affecting her life and program. When the decisions are made by "experts" in the denominational headquarters they are never adequate to the type of mission that the Latin Church is called. The program of the church must grow from her involvement in the life for a new freedom in partnership, a freedom that will be a reality when a relationship of trust is developed between the Anglo and the Latin Churches.

Since the Spanish-speaking church is numerically small and financially limited, a new missionary policy must be developed by the denominations, one that will place Christian concern above statistical reports and make financial resources available to Spanish-speaking for experimentation in a ministry of involvement with no strings attached. This will give the Latin Church a sense of self-determination and will strike out the present situation that only creates dependency.

A church that is limited in the creation of her own program is also crippled in her mission. The present programs that come from the denominations do not meet the needs of a minority caught in rapid social change. For

¹³Monsenor Sergio Mendez-Arceo, op. cit., p. 12.

example, the curriculum now used in the Latin churches is either one prepared by the denominations or one published by the Southern Baptist Church in Spanish. The one that comes from the denominations is, by necessity, a curriculum prepared with the Anglo majority in mind. The orientation and values are geared to a middle-class people but when they are applied to the Mexican-American, who is mostly in the lower class, it results grossly inadequate. Our children are bilingual and bicultural and need a curriculum that speaks to their existing situation and does justice to their cultural values. The other source of our Sunday School material comes from the Southern Baptist Publishing House. The curriculum is very conservative in theology and pietistic in outlook. Thus, it only reinforces the kind of reactionary other-worldly emphasis that now prevails in our churches.

As the Church passes through the struggle for renewal, she will be able to identify herself with the struggle for self-determination of which the Civil Rights Movement is but a necessary phase.

The Mission of the Church

In the first place, the Spanish-speaking church must take seriously her ministry of proclamation. The church has been called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel that is not bound to any structure or

system but that transcends them. She is called to proclaim the love of God for all His children regardless of culture or racial background. She is called to proclaim the freedom of man from the powers of evil and the new humanity offered to him in Jesus Christ. This kind of proclamation needs the development of a prophetic ministry. She must search in the events of the changing times, the work of God; but at the same time, she must stand in judgment of all man-made structures. She cannot identify any system with the will of God nor any government with His kingdom. Rather, she must remain critical of all, knowing full well that the "forces of evil and sin in society continually erode the foundations of justice and stability...Regardless of the impressive gains men have made in humanizing social life, every society is always at the verge of disintegration and chaos."¹⁴

The Latin church needs to undertake a ministry of affirmation. In a pluralistic society toward which we are moving the church needs to become a center of cultural activity. She must be able to call men to God within the cultural reality of the people it tries to reach. This kind of ministry calls for a liturgical renewal, the development of a liturgy that incorporates those cultural

¹⁴Richard Dickinson, Line and Plumet (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), p. 67.

elements present in the Mexican soul. The Latin Church must be able to capture the universality of the gospel and reinterpret its message in the light of the existential situation of the people she serves. She must stop trying to be the door to assimilation, a role she received during the missionary period, and call the people into an atmosphere of freedom and self-discovery.

In a community where the Protestant Church is an insignificant number, rigid denominational divisions are a hindrance for an effective ministry to an un-churched minority. Our ministry will be mediocre as long as we present a divided witness. The Latin-American churches must go farther than their respective denominations and establish new and creative ways of cooperation. The anti-Catholic policy, which is also part of the legacy of the missionary period, should be dropped and a dialogue at different levels must be established between the two traditions of Christianity. Again we must re-affirm that no church or denomination has a monopoly of the Gospel; on the contrary, we must be open to the free action of God in our world. We must learn together, and from each other, as we experience the will of God in our struggle for renewal.

A prophetic ministry will force the Latin Church to take independent and controversial stands; thus, she needs

the support of the denomination, a support given on the basis of mutual trust, that reflects the acceptance of each other as mature and responsible bodies.

The church needs to engage in dialogue with all the ideologies that are participating in the struggle for social justice. It means that the church must learn humility in the light of today's pluralistic world. She needs to recognize that she does not have the sole possession of the prophetic ministry; nor does she have complete control on God's revelation. She needs to know that she is only one voice among many and that God may select to work outside of the church for the benefit of mankind.¹⁵

The Latin Church needs to take her teaching role seriously. In a society that is as complex as ours the church needs to develop well-trained leadership. She needs to train theologians that may be able to re-interpret the Gospel in the light of the existential situation of the Mexican-American. She needs to develop a laity that will be able to provide the Christian insights into every situation of life. She needs Christian educators that can develop and implement a curriculum that takes into account the culture and needs of this minority.

But above all, the church must put emphasis on the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 94.

Human. She must rededicate herself to the improvement of the quality of human life. Thus, she must denounce all the systems or structures that dehumanized, or oppressed man. But at the same time, she must see man in a proper perspective guarding him from false utopias.

The Spanish-speaking Church must become the "community who confirms mankind in its freedom to fashion its future, protesting the pretensions to ultimacy in any human structures, and suffering with men in the struggle against the powers of evil".¹⁶ She must follow the example of her master and become a servant church, that lives and expends her life in the service of others. Only as she gives her life she will find her soul.

Towards a Theology of Revolution

Before Martin Luther King was assassinated he wrote these words: "These are revolutionary times. Throughout the world men are rising against the old systems that exploit and oppress them."¹⁷ The questions facing the churches today are not concerned with the possibilities of revolution but those dealing with her role in a revolutionary world. These questions become even more critical for

¹⁶Winter, op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁷Martin Luther King, "Mas Alla de Vietnam", Cristianismo y Sociedad VI:16-17, p. 54. (Translation mine).

the Spanish-speaking Church, because of the profound way in which the present revolution is affecting the life of those she is serving. To ignore the drastic changes taking place in our society will only widen the gap that exists between her and the community. Furthermore, a negative attitude in the face of needed transformation will place the church in the side of the reactionary structures of society, that by making "peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable".¹⁸ If the Latin Church continues in her attitude of uninvolvedness, the changes that will follow will profoundly affect her membership and they will be unable to carry out their call to be "the light of the world" and the "salt of the earth" of the new society that will emerge.

The call to involvement necessitates a sense of direction and a basic underlying ideology. There are no ready-made theologies of revolution which are applicable to every situation. They are biblical interpretations that are born from a reflection and discovery of the task of the Church in the place where she makes her witness. The Black churchmen discovered an eschatological theology that enabled them to be at the center of the civil rights movement.¹⁹ The Church in Latin-America, confronted with

¹⁸ John F. Kennedy, quoted in Ibid., p. 53

violent revolution, is turning to a Messianic interpretation of their Christian faith.²⁰ In the same manner, the Spanish-American Church needs to search into her existential moments, be open to the signs of the times, and reflect on the biblical message in the light of the past and present events of the people that she serves. Only through such reflection will she be able to discover the saving actions of God in the daily lives of these people.

At the center of these reflections must be the fact that God is both the creator and ruler of all spheres of nature and society. This means that a theology of revolution is grounded on the acceptance of the sovereignty of God, thus, making all human loyalties relative. All man-made systems are "temporal realities and existing to serve God's purpose for man; therefore, they can and must be used and changed in line with that purpose."²¹

A theology of revolution is a process theology that sees history moving towards a new creation. "Thus, history is not merely a constant struggle for human liberation; it is a struggle that is moving forward toward

¹⁹Hough, op. cit., p. 73.

²⁰Carl Oglesby and Richard Shaull, Containment and Change (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 219.

²¹Richard Shaull, "Revolutionary Change in Theological Perspective", in Harvey Cox (ed.) The Church and Revolution (New York: Association Press, 1967), p. 32.

its goal."²²

A theology of revolution must be concerned with the liberation of man and the humanization of history. Such human fulfillment is based on the proper perception of the New Humanity that we find in Jesus Christ. "Thus, politics and revolution are set in a context in which they can contribute to human well-being only if they are kept in their proper place, as servants of the new humanity."²³

It is in this context that a new theology of revolution must examine the question of violence. The Christian Church cannot identify herself with the status quo but at the same time she cannot be identified with a violent upheaval. We must remember that sooner or later every violence breeds violence which stands in direct contradiction to the humanizing process. Once we have said this, we are forced to acknowledge the value of violence in a closed social system. We are also reminded that violence has been acceptable both to our Nation in its formation and is a legacy of our Judeo-Christian tradition. Willis E. Elliott points it out very well when he states: "Yahweh did not frustrate Pharoah's army. He wiped it out."²⁴

²²Oglesby and Shaul, op. cit., p. 217.

²³Ibid., p. 229.

²⁴Willis E. Elliott, "No Alternative to Violence" Renewal Magazine (October 1968), 5.

Furthermore, as we reflect our own history of minority-majority relations we find that violent confrontation has been, at times, the only path open to achieve a just and needed change in the social structure.

Renewal of the church will not come easy. Involvement in the present civil rights movements, and later in the society that will emerge, involves great risks. But the challenge has been made. The eyes of these people for whom religion is still a vital force in their daily lives, are upon the church. The process of humanization will continue with or without the church. "The gospel proclaims that God became man to overcome man's sin and death by participating in man's suffering and struggle."²⁵ The church has participated in the suffering of the Mexican-American; can she refuse now to participate in his struggle?

²⁵Masao Takenaka, "Between the Old and the New Worlds", Cox, op. cit., p. 205.

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